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Marina Warner on the honeyed words of women; Cairns Craig on the stink of literary prizes

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Chris Price on corrupt criminal justice and the Guildford Four

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Europe after the Wall: Einhorn and Kaldor, RW Johnson, Christa Wolf

Wir sind alle Berliner

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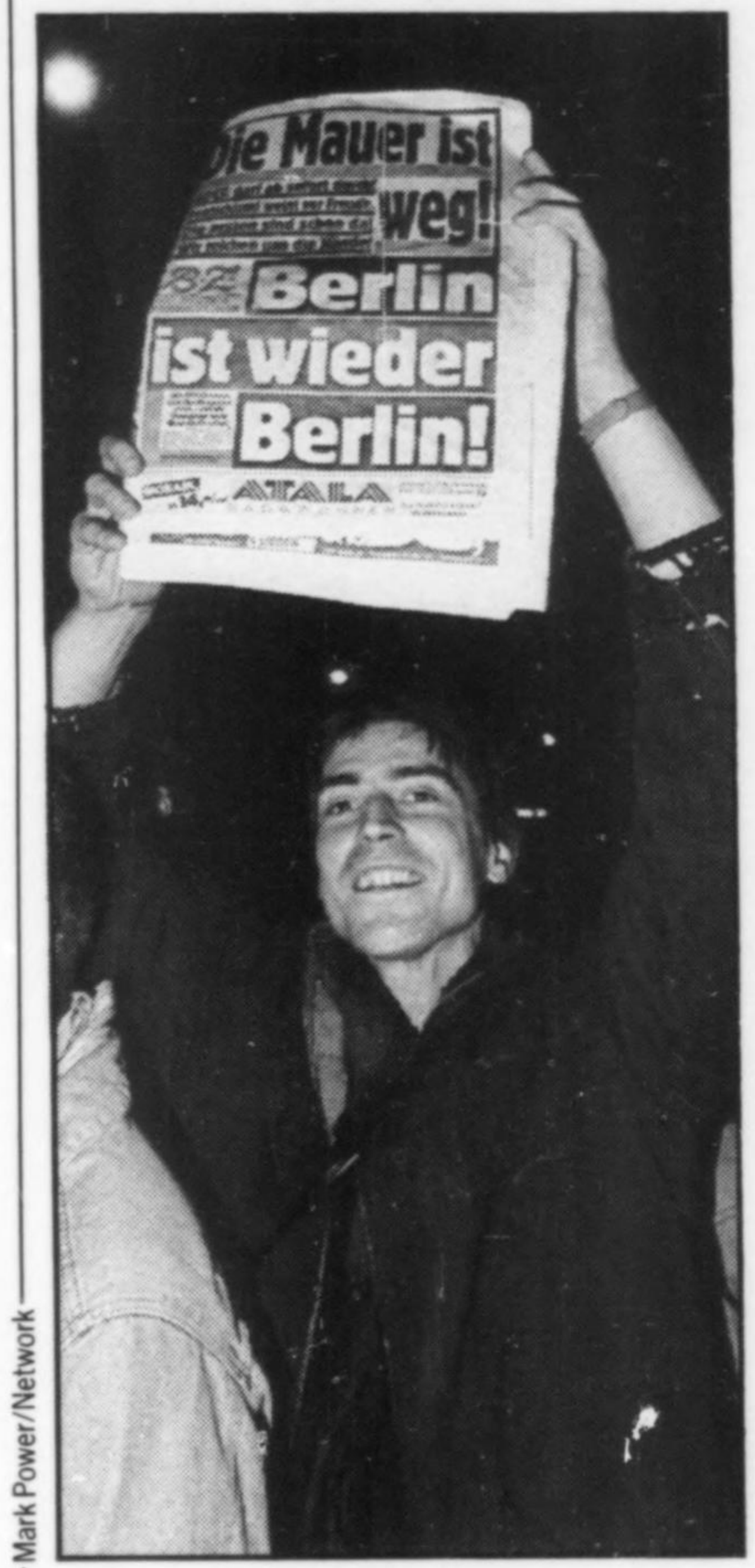
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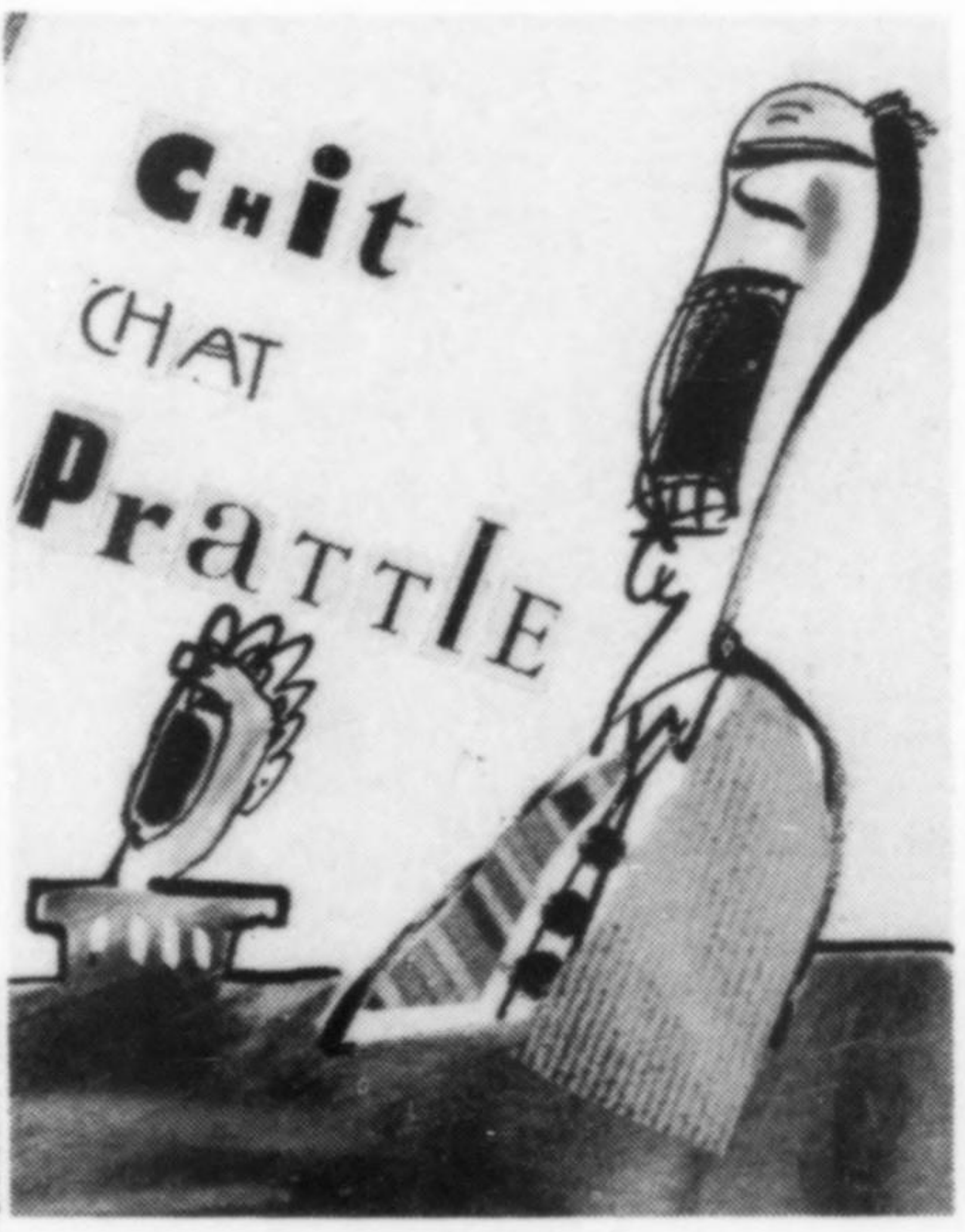

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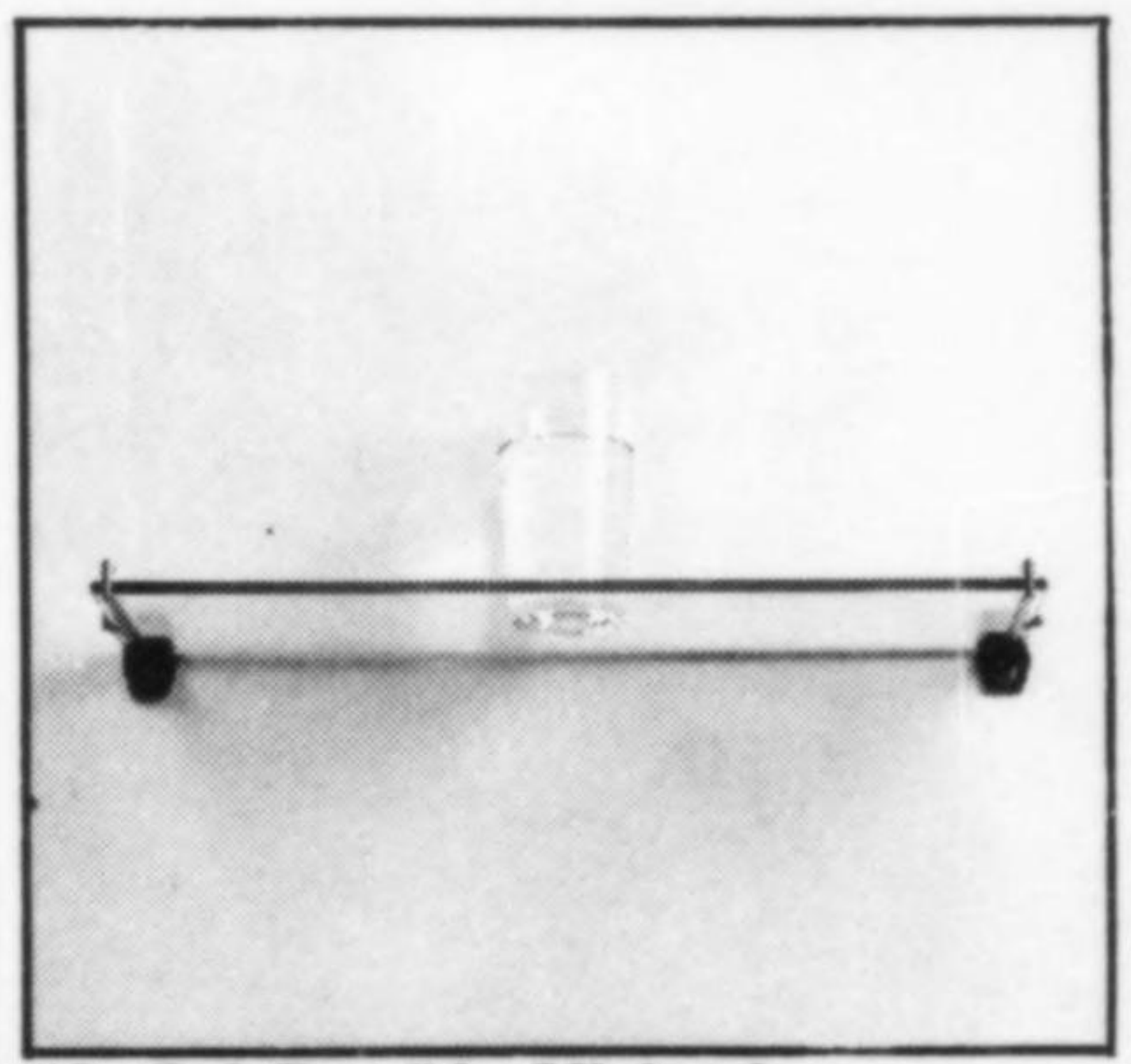

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cent), and Dutch (60 per cent). The Australians (42 per cent) and Americans (38 per cent) were far less welfare-minded than the Europeans.

We also accept taxes with more equanimity than the Americans and Australians, at least so far as the middle classes are concerned. Some 68 per cent of Americans think that taxes are too high for middle-income groups, compared to 40 per cent of the British (the lowest of all nationalities). We overwhelmingly (85 per cent, higher than any other country) think the poor are taxed too highly.

We believe, in common with other Europeans, in using taxation to redistribute income (63 per cent, as against 81 per cent for Italy, 56 per cent for West Germany, 64 per cent for the Netherlands and 77 per cent for Hungary). Again, the capitalists disagree: only 28 per cent of Americans, and 42 per cent of Australians, approve of the principle of redistributive taxation.

But the roots of all this egalitarianism may not lie in altruism, but stem from the universal feeling that we are hard up. If you ask Americans where they place themselves, in terms of their *personal* social standing, on a ten-rung ladder, 18 per cent say the top three rungs, compared to 8 per cent of Britons. Seventeen per cent of us think we are on the bottom two rungs. We are more pessimistic about our individual prosperity than any other nation apart from the Hungarians.

"On the central issues of taxation and welfare we are far more in line with our social democratic European neighbours than with America and Australia"

Likewise, the Americans and Australians may not object to welfarism on principle, but because they are optimistic about being able to exploit the system as it stands: 71 per cent of Americans agree that "people like me have a good chance of improving our standard of living". The figures for other countries were: Australia: 58; Italy: 43; West Germany: 36; Britain: 36; Hungary: 33; Netherlands: 23.

Do these disparities matter? They certainly do to the British government, which is staking a lot on alleged national difference to slow the pace of European integration. According to Employment Secretary Norman Fowler: "We object to the Social Charter because it fails to recognise the diversity of national practice from one country to the next. On many of the issues covered, different traditions require different approaches in different countries."

Unfortunately for the Conservatives, the traditions point in exactly the wrong direction. Instead of being a nation of entrepreneurial, self-sufficient meritocrats, we are one of egalitarian, welfarist pessimists.

"British Social Attitudes: special international report"; edited by Roger Jowell, Sharon Witherspoon and Lindsay Brook; Gower (1989)

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward on the fringe of the History Workshop

Back in the late sixties, at the urgent promptings of a wandering scholar, Martin Small, who died tragically young, I paid my ten shillings and unrolled my sleeping bag at Ruskin College for what must have been the second or third History Workshop.

It was a revelation for me. I don't mean the pat-a-cake Marxism that was *de rigueur* in those days. I was used to that. What delighted me was the spectacle of a carnival of scholarship utterly different from the atmosphere of any place of higher learning I had ever visited. It was like our vision of the universities of the Middle Ages when bands of questioners assembled around particular researchers, picked up what they had to offer and then moved on.

Oxford was started by rebel students from Paris, Cambridge by rebels from Oxford, Harvard US by rebels from Cambridge UK, and so on. The History Workshops have moved on too, with that absorbing, pricey journal and a remarkable series of books based on themes originally ventilated at its annual bazaars.

I've usually managed to resist the temptation, but a few years ago I went to the one at Leicester, facing the usual agonies of choice between 20 simultaneous "streams" of seminars. The Blues guru Paul Oliver was talking in the popular culture stream about *Blacking Up*, the history and influence of entertainments known unblushingly as "Nigger Minstrels" or "Coon Shows". What legacy of assumptions did they leave behind? I never learned, as I was scheduled to talk in another stream at the time.

Last week I was lured to History Workshop 23 at Salford University. It was a fitting venue because in the immediate locality you can see the devastating results both of the collapse of manufacturing industry, and of heavy-handed municipal redevelopment in the postwar years. It is the setting of Robert Roberts's classic study of *The Classic Slum*, and of Walter Greenwood's 1930s novel *Love on the Dole*.

Indeed, we began with a showing of the 1940 film of Greenwood's book, and there on the platform was Edmund Frow, a local Communist Party veteran from the period. He explained how the presentation of him and his insistence on the reality of the class struggle was carefully diluted, first in the novel and then in the film.

One of the other 16 streams that I missed entirely was devoted to labour history in museums, important because of the travesty of popular history presented by the heritage industry. Right opposite us in The Crescent, Salford, is the Working-Class Movement Library. Speakers in this stream described how, as a poor relation in this industry, the National Museum of Labour History had moved from the old Limehouse Town Hall to Manchester, since the urge to record "people's history" has "often been prompted by members in local authorities rather than by museum professionals".

One of the minor bygones in the National Museum is the table that Peter Kropotkin used when he lived in Bromley and Brighton, which had formerly belonged to Richard Cobden. When he returned to Russia in 1917 he gave it to Brighton Trades Council. I don't really care about that table. But the session I took care not to miss was Caroline Cahm's paper on Kropotkin and buses. She is the author of *Peter Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism*, to appear in December from Cambridge University Press. It studies Kropotkin's thought about revolutionary action, which was not limited to notions of "propaganda by deed", meaning assassinating Tsars, but embraced the developing role of the organised labour movement. "I wouldn't have spent 15 years writing this book if I didn't think it had some importance for us," she said, and went on to describe her local bus workers in Gosport, Hampshire.

A Labour government nationalised the bus industry to form the National Bus Company, which none of us actually liked. The Thatcher government "deregulated" it and put its component parts up for grabs. In many places there has been a management buy-out. In Gosport, agitators like Cahm urged that the workers should shop around for credit and buy the local company themselves. Now, with about 100 buses and 300 worker-owners, it faces the usual difficulties. Marauding plutocrats are busy trying to buy up local operators or to drive them out of business. Universal car ownership is, as everywhere, making the buses into a ghetto of the old, young, housebound and poor.

Cahm's on the management committee and thinks the venture might just be winning through, in spite of the fact that other bus operators in the locality can provide better wages and conditions, just because of the "greater enthusiasm to provide a service which follows the needs of the passengers".

It was worth going to the History Workshop just to learn about this connection between historical assumptions and life at the bus stop.

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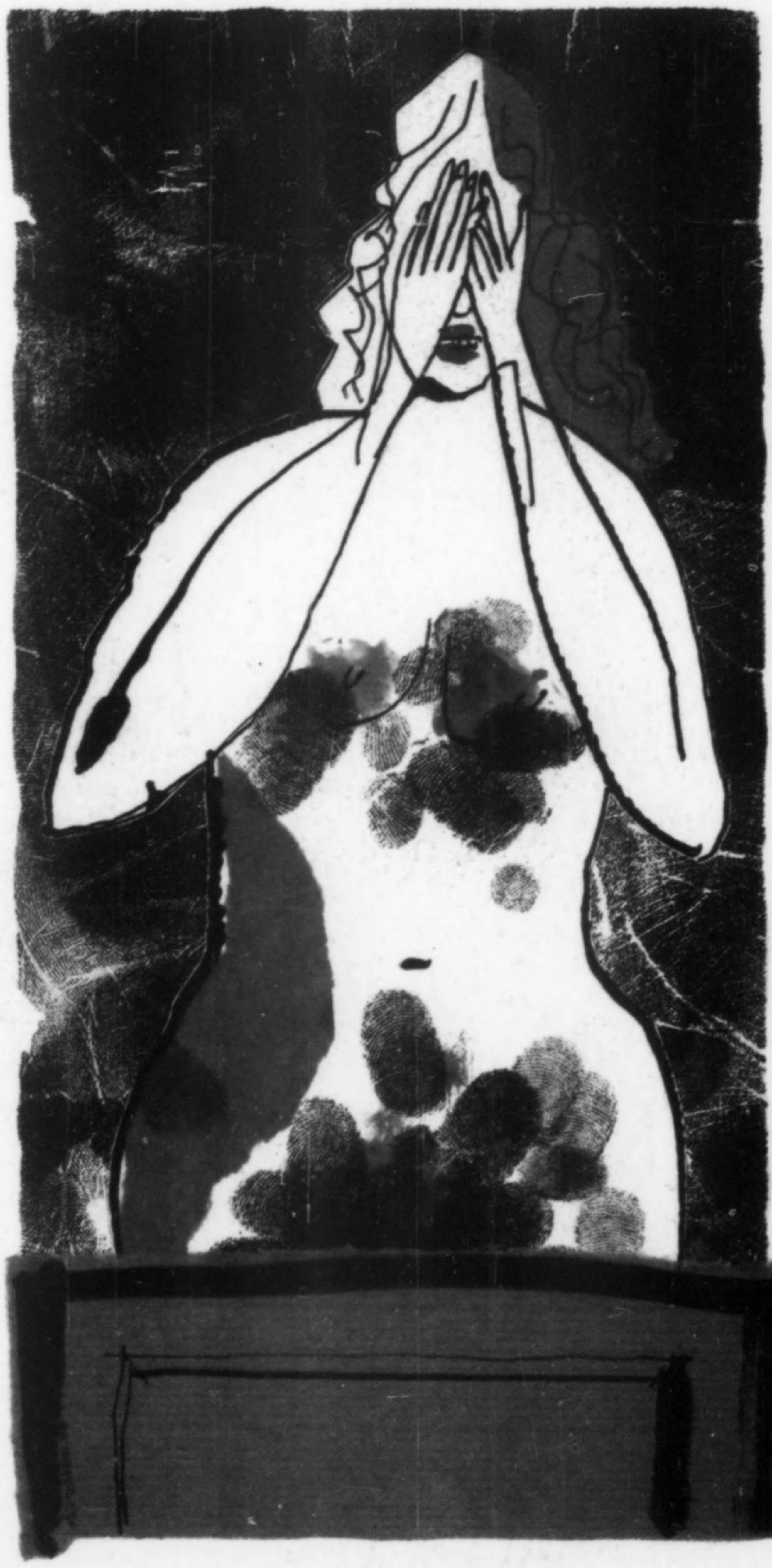
Rape on trial

Dennis Potter on sex, religion and television

Christmas Books: Angela Carter and food, Jeanette Winterson and gardens. Plus Jenny Diski, Gilbert Adair, Don Cupitt, etc

Stuart Cosgrove: Berlin Days



You were raped. Now you are in court. Prove you were really violated. Prove you are really respectable. Whose trial is it anyway?

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Cover: Illustration by Maria Jeeves

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Andrzej Krauze

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward watches the dethronement of the Lord of the Flies

What a delight that the pupils of Trinity School, a comprehensive at Leamington Spa, have rumbled *Lord of the Flies*! The 16 and 17 year olds there, in a film Nigel Evans made for Channel 4, reported that no less than 36 examination boards have used William Golding's novel as a set book for 20 years. They asked the simple question, "Why?"

We have had a barrage of documentary material on how schools are adapting to the entrepreneurial society. So it was an unexpected pleasure to see a film where pupils themselves stressed that, as every parent knows, most children can't wait to get into school at five, and look forward to "the big school" at 11, but can't wait to get out by the time they are 15.

Something gets smothered in between for an uncomfortably large regiment of juvenile conscripts. That it didn't happen to this particular bunch of A-level candidates was generously attributed by them to the influence of Peter Hastings, head of Trinity School from 1967-1988. Their film, *Catching Alight*, used snippets of Peter Brook's film of Golding's novel, and of the author's opinion on original sin, to explain the irresistible charm of the fable for believers in educational order and discipline.

I thought their demolition job useful because our writers really are our unacknowledged legislators and the makers of telling fables *do* influence us more than we like to admit. Like *Robinson Crusoe* or *Animal Farm*, this particular story has entered the world's folk wisdom—Golding was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983.

The last sceptical voice I heard was A S Neill, writing long ago in *Anarchy*. "Golding," he said, "has condemned our whole system of education, and this is not theory; it is a belief founded on half a century of practice. Golding might have introduced at least one girl to soften the hateful hearts, but a girl would have spoiled his pet thesis—that boys are born original sinners and can only be saved by the stern discipline of grown-ups. I hasten to add that some suppressed schoolgirls might also have joined the hunting gang. Golding has studied the wrong children. Presumably he has never seen children who were free from outside moulding, children who got love instead of hate, children who had natural charity and tolerance. He has not seen, as I have for over 40 years, juries of children trying a young thief. Never once was any punishment demanded, only paying back."

The Trinity students underlined his point. It can't be verified experimentally, but there actually exists an account of a real-life situation like that of *Lord of the Flies*, told by Susanna Agnelli in a book about something quite different (*Street Children*, Weidenfeld 1986):

"In 1977, six boys in Tonga, all friends, went fishing. Their boat was caught in a storm and after several terrifying days was wrecked on a reef. The crew had just enough strength to scramble ashore, on to an unknown tropical island. They realised that it was totally uninhabited. Confronted with their predicament, they promised each other that as long as they were there they would never quarrel, because that would spell the end of them; that they would always go about in pairs, in case one had an accident or got lost; and that two of them would keep guard, day and night. They kept their promises, and 15 months later were found and rescued."

This was a different ending from Golding's, where poor, defeated Ralph looks up at the majesty of the disgusted naval officer. Susanna Agnelli believes that "they owed their survival to a shared faith; to the fact that none had any reason to exploit the other; and especially perhaps, to a culture which gave more weight to cooperation than to competition".

She added a remark Neill would have endorsed, and about which it would be fascinating to hear Trinity School students' comments. She said that "modern education has gone to such lengths to subvert this principle that, faced with a similar situation, the urban youngsters of today would be unlikely to react with the same unselfishness and self-reliance".

You can easily test this conclusion by imagining whether you would like to be stuck on a desert island with any of the transient heroes of contemporary British society: Sinclair, Murdoch, Maxwell, Branson? Or do you think of yourself as a child survivor, along with creeps like Parkinson, Gummer, Baker and Fowler as shipmates in the wreck of human values?

There's another great modern fable, where Winston Smith discovers the proles. It suddenly occurs to him that the proles of *1984* were not loyal to a country or a party of an idea, but that "they were loyal to one another. For the first time in his life he did not despise the proles or think of them merely as an inert force which would one day spring to life and regenerate the world. The proles had stayed human."

Welfare Watch

Funeral rights

Tony Lynes counts the cost of a decent departure

Until 1987, most people dying in the UK qualified for a death grant of at most £30. It was hardly a serious contribution to the costs of a funeral, so the government abolished it, leaving only funeral payments from the social fund in its place. The number of payments fell from 600,000 a year to about 40,000. Those who qualify now get payments averaging over £500, but the eligibility rules are a fertile source of misunderstanding, illustrated by a recent appeal heard by a social security commissioner.

The appellant's sister had died of cancer at the age of 46. After spending her short working life (the commissioner was told) "on charity wages in devoted service to the underprivileged", she suffered eight years of illness and died on supplementary benefit, leaving only £190 towards the cost of her funeral. Most of the remaining cost was borne by her brother.

Just the sort of case, you might think, on which help ought to be targeted, but while the purpose of the old death grant was to enable people to provide for their own funeral costs, social fund payments have a different purpose: to help the surviving relatives meet the costs where a person has failed to make such provision. Entitlement, therefore, depends on the financial situation of the person arranging the funeral as well as that of the deceased. Only people getting income support, family credit or housing benefit qualify for a payment. In the case in question, the brother was getting none of these, so his appeal could not succeed.

Targeting, in this instance, is geographical as well as financial. The social fund will pay for a funeral only if it takes place in the UK. A religious ceremony in Britain followed by cremation or burial overseas does not count as a UK funeral. This mainly affects families of Indian or Pakistani origin. If they have their dead buried or cremated in Britain, they can apply for a social fund payment. But if they choose to incur the additional expense of having the body flown to India, they cannot claim a penny towards the cost, even though most of the normal funeral expenses still have to be met in Britain.

The national insurance death grant has presumably gone for good, but the double means test inherent in the present arrangements would be removed by the Labour Party's proposal for a £600 funeral grant payable on request and recoverable only where the estate of the deceased exceeds a minimum level. Meanwhile, the "burial in Britain" rule could be abolished by a simple amendment of the regulations. Fears of a flood of moribund French (or even East German) citizens crossing the channel to qualify for a grant before being shipped home for burial can probably be discounted.

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Bea Campbell prices women's work; Jeremy Seabrook costs the green revolution

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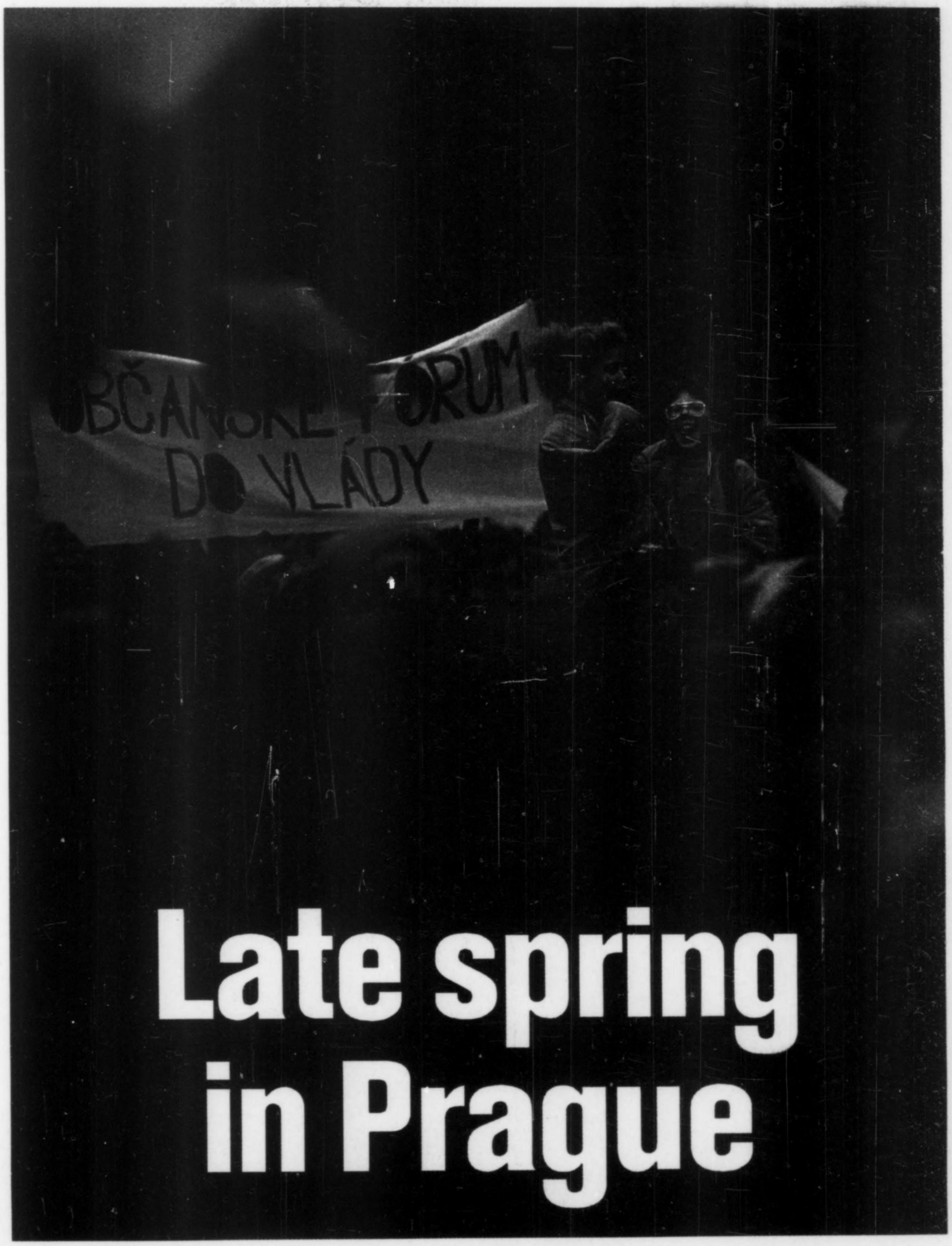

Late spring in Prague

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Sturrock/Network

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Out and about with Muriel Gray

Welfare Watch

Penalty claws

Tony Lynes on the rules that punish the jobless

Leaving or refusing a job without good reason means losing unemployment benefit for up to six months—a penalty of £900 for a single claimant and nearly £1,500 for a married couple. Those claiming income support do not suffer the full penalty, but their normal entitlement is reduced by £14 a week for the same period, a loss of more than £360 if they remain unemployed for six months.

The maximum disqualification was raised from six to 13 weeks in 1986 and to 26 weeks in 1988. Two reports placed in the House of Commons library, one by the DSS and the other by Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR), fulfil, somewhat inadequately, an undertaking to monitor the effects of the 26-week limit. But the policy implications are clear enough: there is no justification for disqualifying people for six months rather than six weeks.

The DSS report shows that, although adjudication officers have unfettered discretion in deciding the period of disqualification, the full 26-week penalty was imposed in 64 per cent of cases in January-March 1989. Comparing this with 1987, when the maximum was 13 weeks, it appears that six out of seven people who would have lost up to 13 weeks' benefit in 1987 now lose up to 26 weeks.

The SCPR report ("Voluntary unemployment—benefit sanctions" by Jane Ritchie and Alison Faulkner) explores the effects of the rules on 49 claimants interviewed in February 1989, of whom only 34 had actually been disqualified. Most did not know of the 26-week penalty until they were hit by it. Many thought it was still six weeks and nearly all, whether disqualified or not, thought 26 weeks was too long.

Only two of those disqualified considered the decision fair. Only two said the rule had made them stick to a job longer (not necessarily a good thing: one of them objected to the job on safety grounds); and only one said that disqualification had hastened his search for a new job. Even in these cases, the report offers no evidence that six months' disqualification was more effective than six weeks.

The authors concede that the effect of the rule is actually to prolong unemployment. People would rather stay out of work longer than risk taking a job which may not work out, thus incurring another period of disqualification. In short, there is no evidence that extending the disqualification period has served any purpose other than to condemn large numbers of people to live below the poverty line for months rather than weeks.

The government should admit that it was wrong and restore the maximum period to six weeks.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward hears about proud German cities

Our foremost urban geographer, Peter Hall, breezed into London last month to address the 75th anniversary conference of the Royal Town Planning Institute. He ranged, as he tends to these days, from Keynes to Kropotkin, and very tellingly, from Galbraith to the Greens.

And he brought the scorn of all of them to bear on London, the triumph of the entrepreneurial society. "We live," he observed, "in good, well-furnished and graciously decorated houses, we eat increasingly good food washed down with good wine... we live, literally, the lives of princes. But this world ends as soon as we go outside our front doors." London, he told the planners, with humour, "has become the sink, the cesspit, of the urban world".

Remember that these are the words of a man who knows every metropolis around the globe. "I used to say," he went on, "that we have third world standards in the middle of the first. Now I think that unfair: many so-called third world cities, in Asia and Latin America, are actually in far better physical shape."

But in reminding us of the total lack of balance between our private and our public lives, the contrast he chose was that of the cities of the German Federal Republic. The reason he found them as exhilarating as he found London depressing was not merely their affluence, it was the plain and visible result of the influence on German politics and policies of the green movement. ("The so-called Greens," as our Prime Minister dismissively calls them.)

Simply to undermine our resignation, it is well worth quoting Peter Hall's German impressions, so you can make the necessary comparisons: "In every city—in Munich, in Stuttgart, in Frankfurt—they have built magnificent new public transport systems: underground railways and suburban trains that tunnel under the city centres. In every one, virtually the whole city centre has been turned into a pedestrian precinct, an oasis of peace and calm from which the car has been banished and people walk free. The streets are bursting with life; the crowds are almost overwhelming. They are happy, relaxed, carefree crowds. Scores of entertainers, some familiar, some exotic, perform for their pleasure..."

He went on to lament that he had not carried a video camera to record the sounds he heard in German streets, to try to convey the *quality* of street life. But he had a similarly significant thing to say about the urban hinterland:

"Just off centre, in the older inner-residential districts, they have now adopted a different battery of tactics. The traffic is being calmed by making it drive at walking speed; main streets are actually being narrowed to provide more space for pedestrians and bikes. Everywhere, bikes have their own lanes at the kerbside of the pavement: a device we adopted along our arterial roads in the 1930s and then allowed to fall into disuse. The sheer volume of bike traffic is amazing. Sidewalk cafés make walking a pleasure. The cities are being won back for people."

Now, I think his comments very important. They should be widely exploited by interest groups like Transport 2000 and the London Cycling Campaign, by those who share his horror about London, and those who feel dismayed as he does at our "extraordinary act of intellectual abdication" over planning issues.

A week later the Chancellor made his autumn statement, surrounded by the same atmosphere of secrecy and conjuring tricks as the spring budget. He announced that in the next three years £7.7. billion will be spent on roads, £3.7 billion on British Rail and £1.7 billion on London Regional Transport. He gave no indication as to how much of these last two sums would be met by government.

The way such decisions are made in centralised secrecy in Britain contrasts, as much as the resulting condition of the cities, with the situation in the German Federal Republic. There, not only the 11 *Länder* but the cities themselves have considerable autonomy and revenue-gathering powers.

Peter Hall deplored the fact that England never had an equivalent of the great German or Italian 15th-century free city-states. He regretted that the provincial urban tradition, exemplified by Victorian Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, was allowed to wither as a result of the dominance of English central government, while "London, the legatee of this process of drainage, failed to benefit. It never built up a strong and proud tradition of urban adminstration," precisely because "the central government was always too frightened of London to give it much rope".

This is why he urged that "in the cities, we need a return of civic independence and civil pride, coupled with a devolution of responsibility to the most local level". Is that on *your* agenda?

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SOCIETY

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Fat cat Europe

On the Tebbit Express with Liverpool's migrant workers

Escape Christmas with Raymond Briggs, Martin Amis, Kathy Acker. Eat with a clutch of MPs. Plus drink, kids' videos, gifts

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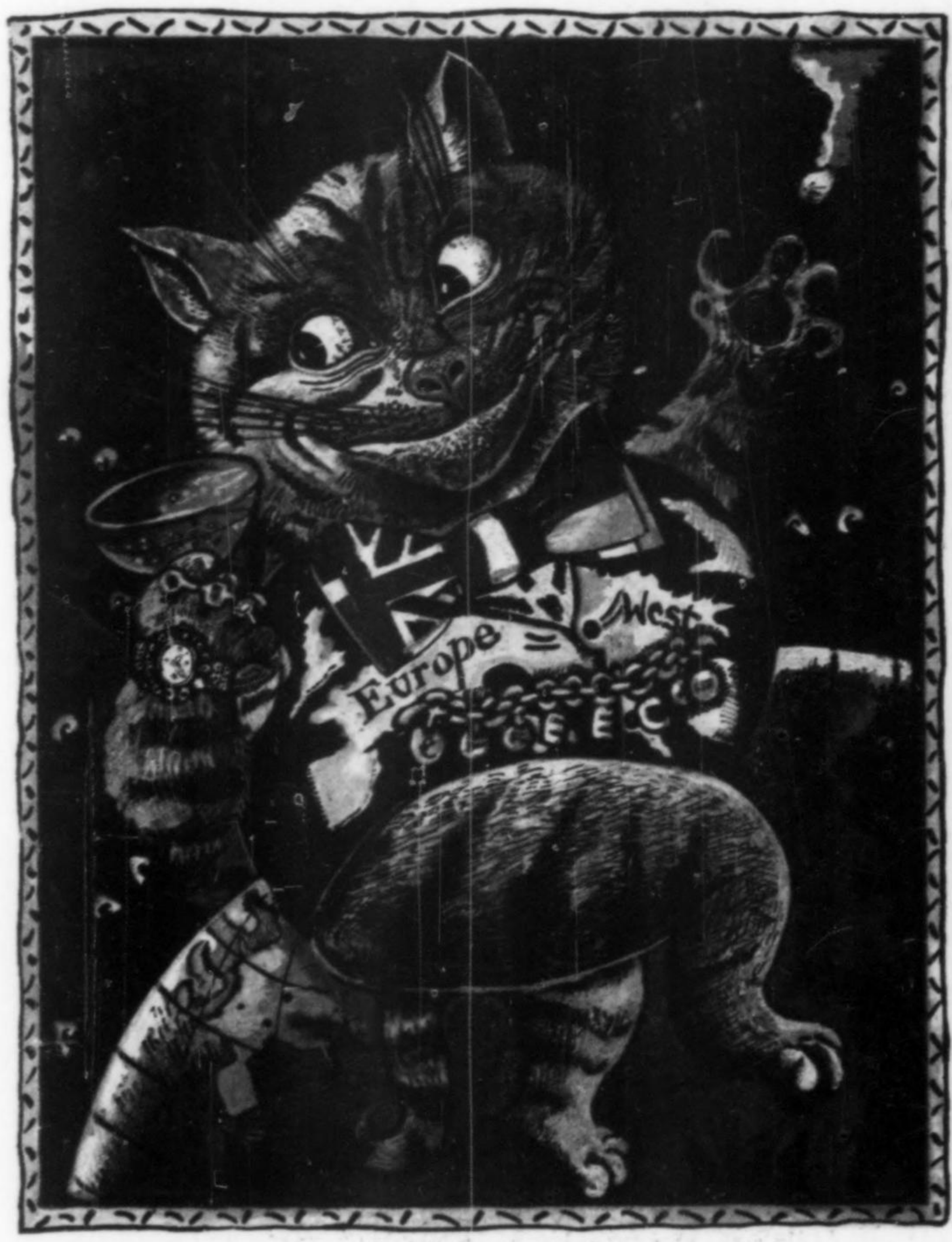
Ros Coward looks at body language



Strasbourg's fat cats claim that west Europe is the envy of the world. Yet we milk the world's poor and east Europe distrusts us. Read Robin Simpson, John Keane and Vaclav Havel, and R W Johnson inside

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"One isn't paying"
YOU CAN'T BE FINED
You can't go to Jail
All you risk is a 10% surcharge
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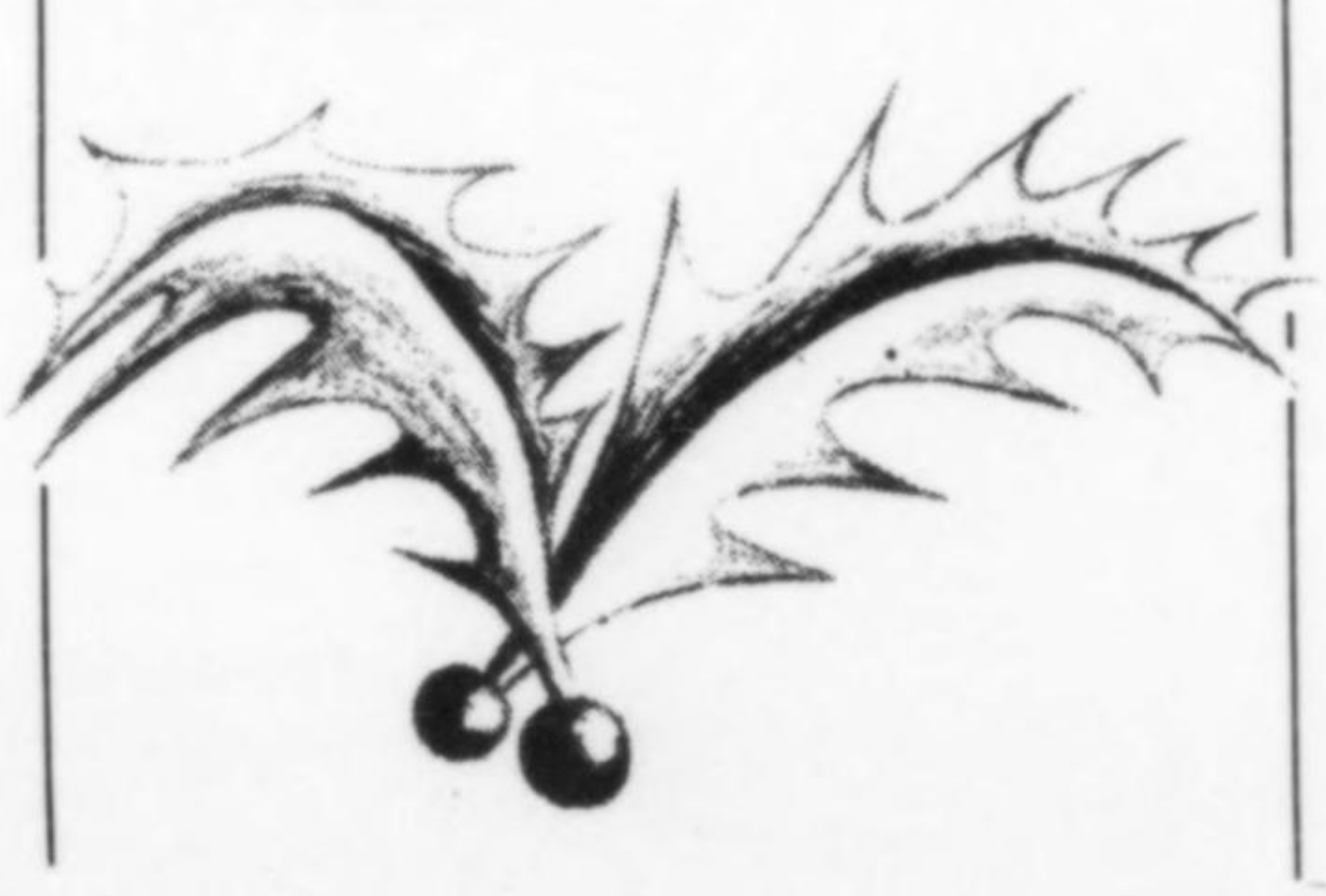

Welfare Watch

Mean test

Tony Lynes warns of a new peril for people seeking part-time work

Means-testing of unemployment benefit starts this weekend under regulations laid before parliament three weeks ago. Anyone earning £43 from a part-time job will lose a whole week's benefit. As £43 is now less than average earnings for a day's work, the rule will be a drastic deterrent to part-time work.

The DSS estimates that 30,000 people will be affected each week. The numbers affected in the course of a year will be far greater—perhaps as many as half a million could either lose one or more week's benefit or be forced to turn down offers of work.

The regulations have not been approved, or even debated, by either house of parliament. Like most social security regulations, they come into force automatically on whatever date the government decides. The proposal did, however, have to be submitted to the social security advisory committee (SSAC), whose report and the secretary of state's response to it are now available (Cm 923, HMSO, £2.30). The justification for the £43 limit, the committee was told, is that anyone earning this much has to pay national insurance. In the government's view, it is wrong to treat people as employed for contribution purposes and unemployed for benefit purposes in the same week.

The committee was not impressed by this argument. While it accepted that a weekly earnings rule might be an appropriate way of deciding whether a person is unemployed, it considered that a limit as low as £43 would "catch people whom the reasonable onlooker would regard as unemployed and would consider should be entitled to benefit".

The committee endorsed the CBI's objection to the likely deterrent effect of the rule on part-time employment. It also noted as "a matter for considerable concern" the possibility, pointed out by the Low Pay Unit, that a person who turned down a part-time job because of the means test might not only lose that week's benefit but could be refused benefit for up to six months on grounds of "voluntary unemployment".

The committee's recommendation was that the means-test proposal should be dropped and a thorough review made of the unemployment benefit rules, taking into account the effects of the new "actively seeking work" test.

When the CBI, the Low Pay Unit and SSAC are united in opposing a change, any government not convinced of its own infallibility might be expected to think again. But not this government. The new regulations make no concessions whatever. From now on, therefore, unemployed people should be wary of accepting any offer of part-time work paying £43 or more.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward hears why Breton broccoli is on the menu in New York

I wrote recently about the report *Cornwall at the Crossroads* from the Cornish Social and Economic Research Group in Redruth, and its urgings that its county should learn from the experience of its French equivalent, Finistère in Brittany.

As France's north-west is far more prosperous than England's south-west, while equally remote from the capitals where important things happen, this is good advice. But you can scour the business sections of all the posh papers and their discussion of integration with Europe, only to find that they are all about money and returns on investment and not about people producing goods to earn a living.

So I was eager to watch BBC1's *Country File* on 19 November at the unsocial viewing hour of midday, as it promised a direct Cornish-Breton comparison. We got a lot of mugshots of the Duke of Cornwall (Prince Charles) telling his vassals to buck up their ideas, and of fish wholesalers talking of their efforts to provide a bigger value-added quotient to dead fish by investing in freezing plants, thus opening up the south-European markets.

This in itself is a familiar story. I've mentioned how we export coal dust to Germany because there has been a willingness there to invest in the plant to produce briquette fuel for re-import here. I was told the other day how Britain imports American wastepaper because it's cheaper than systematic collection for recycling here. A Paris-based firm has just taken over refuse collection in the patch of rural Suffolk where I live.

A visitor from another planet would conclude that we are all in thrall to the transport industry. *Country File*'s Breton interviews certainly implied this. At St Pol de Leon we were introduced to the secretary of SICA, a cooperative of growers. He was a solid square-faced character who bashed out three messages. The first was the endless co-op advice for rugged individualists everywhere: you're lost on your own, but together you can achieve something. The second was the importance of cheap credit. It's the same lesson from anywhere in Europe where small-scale production has actually succeeded. High interest rates spell death, cheap borrowing spells life, both for you and the lender.

In Britain, of course, we have got used to the idea that manipulation of interest rates is *the* economic regulator. The rest of us just have to suffer the results.

The third lesson from Brittany was rather less acceptable. The man from SICA explained how, when the shipping firms weren't interested in a ferry to Cornwall, the co-op financed it itself. It took typical Cornish products like fish and cauliflowers from there to here, and, naturally, tourists from here to there. The ferry is now flourishing and self-financing.

But the Breton growers' co-op didn't stop there. It lobbied for the enlargement of the airport at Brest, and aided by both French government and EC funds, achieved it. Now it flies vegetables to New York and Montreal on one plane a week. "In a year," said Mr SICA, "we'll have two planes a week, and in five years, two planes a day."

Now who, other than the expansive SICA members and the air freight firms, actually rejoices in this? Over the river from New York is New Jersey, which has always called itself "The Garden State", since for a century it has grown vegetable crops for the huge metropolitan cities of the East Coast. Montreal has always been fed by poor French-Canadian farmers in Quebec.

New Jersey tried to survive by importing cheap Puerto Rican labour, but was outclassed by both California and Florida, with their huge reservoirs of Latin American pickers and packers. I've never been to Brittany and I've no idea whether or not those delicious fresh broccoli are picked, processed and packed by the philoprogenitive Bretons or by third generation North African immigrants—one of whom will now be dreaming up a scheme for exporting Algerian vegetables all over the world.

I don't know where this process ends. It's no solution for Brittany and it's no solution for Cornwall either. We're stuck in a technical fix. Anything can be produced anywhere, thanks to every kind of climate control, fertiliser and pesticide, and then transported everywhere, since once you've started a service it's cheaper to keep it going than to run it down.

The market rules, and it also excludes any producer wanting to break in. Why shouldn't Brittany, or Cornwall, or Korea or Vietnam conquer the world's consumers, but for the fact that production for a local market is simple, logical and useful? There is also evidence that the transport of everything everywhere builds up a legacy of waste, pollution and financial corruption that everyone, everywhere will have to pay for. It is a very heavy price.

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Visions of blasphemy

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FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward hears a tune the pianola cannot play

In the next village, John Bulman turns his hand to every skill from book-binding to bee-keeping. So when his daughter bought a clapped-out pianola she assumed Dad would be able to fix it.

If you've ever seen the insides of one of them, you will know that they are an indescribable triumph of several fields of mechanical engineering: a series of smooth-running cogwheels and sprocket chains, dozens of bellows, large and small, delicate punched-paper rolls, and a mass of perished rubber tubes.

The problem was how to fit these 3-millimetre tubes on to 4-millimetre pipe ends, one for every note on the keyboard. He asked around among every kind of specialist. An aeronautical engineer suggested the use of expanding forceps, and a surgeon who used the same device for keeping arteries apart had the same idea. A chemist urged that he should soak the tubes in xylene to expand them to fit. A civil engineer argued that, after expanding them in this way, they should be frozen to -20 degrees Celsius and assembled before they warmed up.

John pondered over these intriguing examples of technology transfer, but vaguely remembered seeing a games teacher effortlessly getting rubber grips on to cricket bat handles. So he devised a piece of wire with a nodule at the end, like the way the spokes are held into a cycle wheel rim, and accomplished his mission.

We all bring our preconceptions to any task, since as Mark Twain put it, "if your only tool is a hammer, all problems look like nails".

Marxists all over the world, confident that history itself was on their side, saw themselves as the hammer of their mythological proletariat. Like the Christians who converted the rulers of the Roman Empire, they saw the conquest of the power of the state as the way human destiny would be fulfilled. Once you've got that hammer in your hand, you can drive in every nail.

First expand the people with hopes of liberation, then freeze them and reassemble them the right way before they warm up. Don't worry about those who are beyond redemption. This is the logic of every hammer-man from Lenin and Stalin to Mao and Pol Pot. Sometimes there's a power failure and the freezer doesn't work any more. Hence the current jubilation in eastern Europe.

The engineers in different fields are busy with alternative methods of making the people fit their chosen system. The expanding forceps of nationalism, religion and ethnic differences are guaranteed to keep the people apart. But they won't pull the people together.

Among our regrets, one is that there are plenty of places where the machinery of terror and intimidation still work. Another is that, at every stage in the demarxification of eastern Europe, we have had apologists in safe little capitalist Britain to explain that the events in Berlin in 1953, Poland and Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland again in 1970 and 1980 were simply fomented by the Americans or the Catholic church.

I'm endlessly reminded of one of those jokes from the Gomulka period in Poland. "Tell me," a young man asks the priest or rabbi, "is it possible to have socialism in one country?" The cleric replies: "Oh, yes, it's possible, provided you live in another one."

But the biggest regret is that the experience of Marxist rule has set back the cause of socialism by a century. Of course, every ideology uses its forceps, its freezing and rewarming device, or a simple stretching, to make us fit. It suits our current rulers to redefine passengers, patients or pupils as customers, just as they have been renamed as the proletariat in the east. In both systems, the rulers have their own private transport, medical care and schools, and would not dream of using the means provided for their subjects. Hard steel at one end, flexible rubber at the other. It works with pianolas, assuming the pedals, cogs, bellows, tubes and pipes are all intact. But it doesn't work with human societies, whatever the tune that is fed in.

Lenin, like the man with the hammer, assumed that "the whole of society will have to become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay". As the nails got bent he tried his New Economic Policy. Disconcerted with the results, he decided that the reason was that it had "lost sight of the co-operatives" which he had previously dismissed as "collective capitalist institutions".

So he banged home another simple message: that the remaining task was to "organise the population in cooperative societies". What he and his endless successors never understood was that you can't do this with a hammer, with a deep-freeze, and not even by stretching them to fit. It's a kind of socialism that can only evolve from below in its own way and its own time. You can treat people like rubber, force them into your system and make them play any tune you like. But rubber perishes. No amount of technology transfer will stop the survivors from making their own choices.

Welfare Watch

Future shock

Tony Lynes predicts the abolition of the basic pension

As the privatisation of pensions accelerates, the time has come to ask where present policies are leading. The answer, if 1993 produces another Tory government, could well be the end of state pensions altogether.

The abolition of the state earnings-related pension scheme (SERPS), now ten years old, was proposed in Norman Fowler's 1985 green paper, *Reform of Social Security*. In its place, people in work would have had to pay a minimum contribution to a private scheme.

At the time, nobody but Fowler was keen on the idea—not even the private pensions industry, which saw little joy in selling pensions to millions of mainly low-paid, mobile and part-time workers. So the government dropped it. SERPS survived, but with changes in the pension formula which roughly halved its value for those expecting to retire in 2030 or later. Private provision remained voluntary, but its growth was encouraged by the extra contribution of 2 per cent of earnings paid by the national insurance fund to new contracted-out schemes.

Things now look very different. Aided by tax relief and the 2 per cent bribe, some four million people have bolted into so-called personal pension schemes, leaving only about eight million in SERPS. Most of these are likely to stay put, having passed the critical age below which privately invested contributions may do better than the same money invested in SERPS. More serious, from the government's point of view, is the threat of mass defections from the private sector, as market forces push middle-aged workers back into SERPS.

The obvious solution is to remove the SERPS option by winding up the scheme. Pensions earned by past contributions would have to be honoured but, for the future, everyone would have to pay into a private scheme.

The national insurance fund would have a short-term cash flow problem, owing to the fact that the contributions currently being paid for future SERPS pensions are used mainly to finance the basic state pension of those already retired. But the basic pension, its real value frozen since 1980, is now only 18 per cent of average earnings. By 2000, if it remains frozen, it could be below 15 per cent.

Most new pensioners will by then have earnings-related pensions, state or private, worth considerably more. Only the very old will still depend mainly on the basic pension, but their situation will be desperate. In the interests of efficient targeting, the basic pension—a wasteful universal handout—will be abolished and a small proportion of the savings will be spent on a generous increase in means-tested income support rates for the over-80s.

Improbable? Maybe not.

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Body special: with Jeanette Winterson, Ros Coward and others

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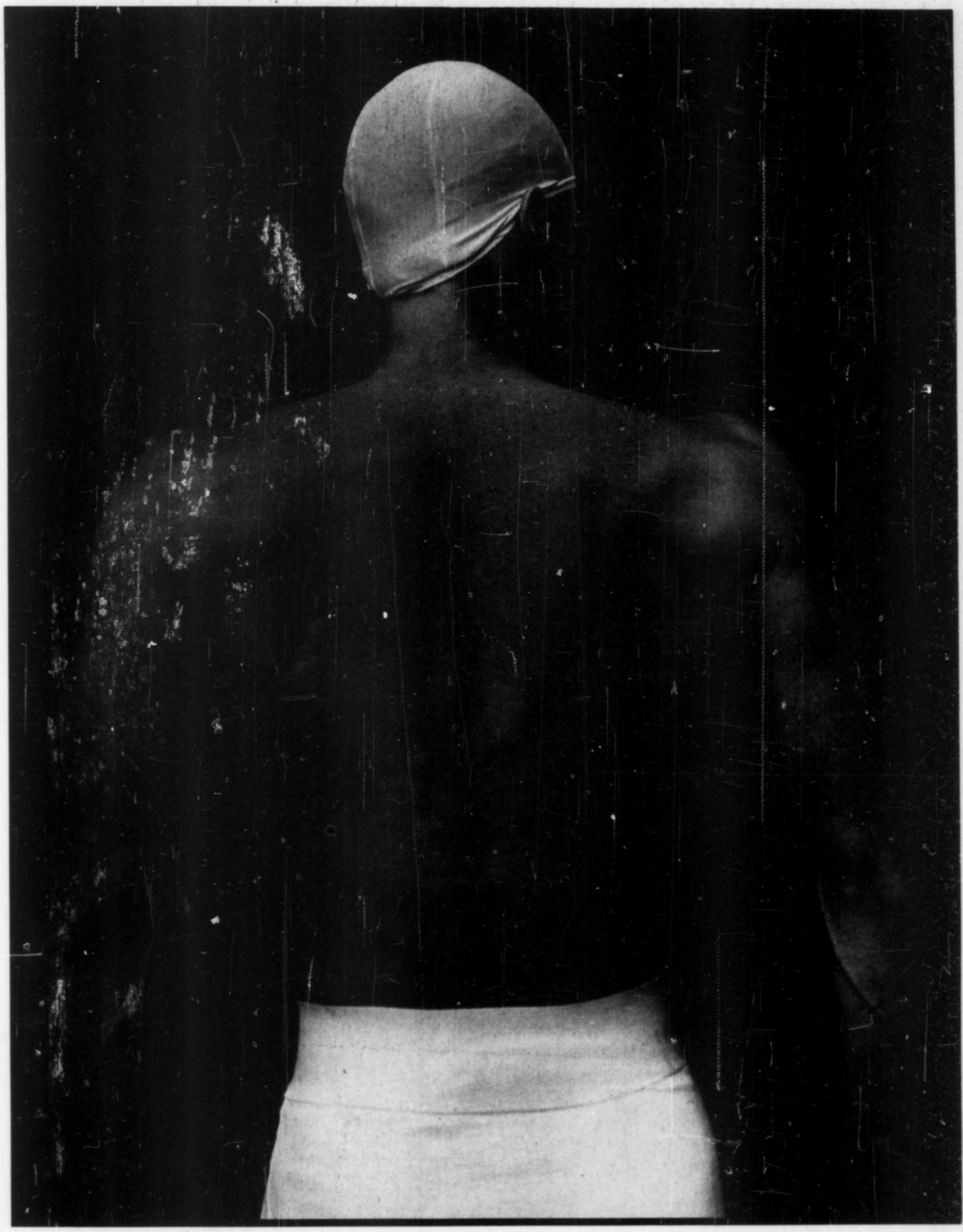

Revolting Bodies

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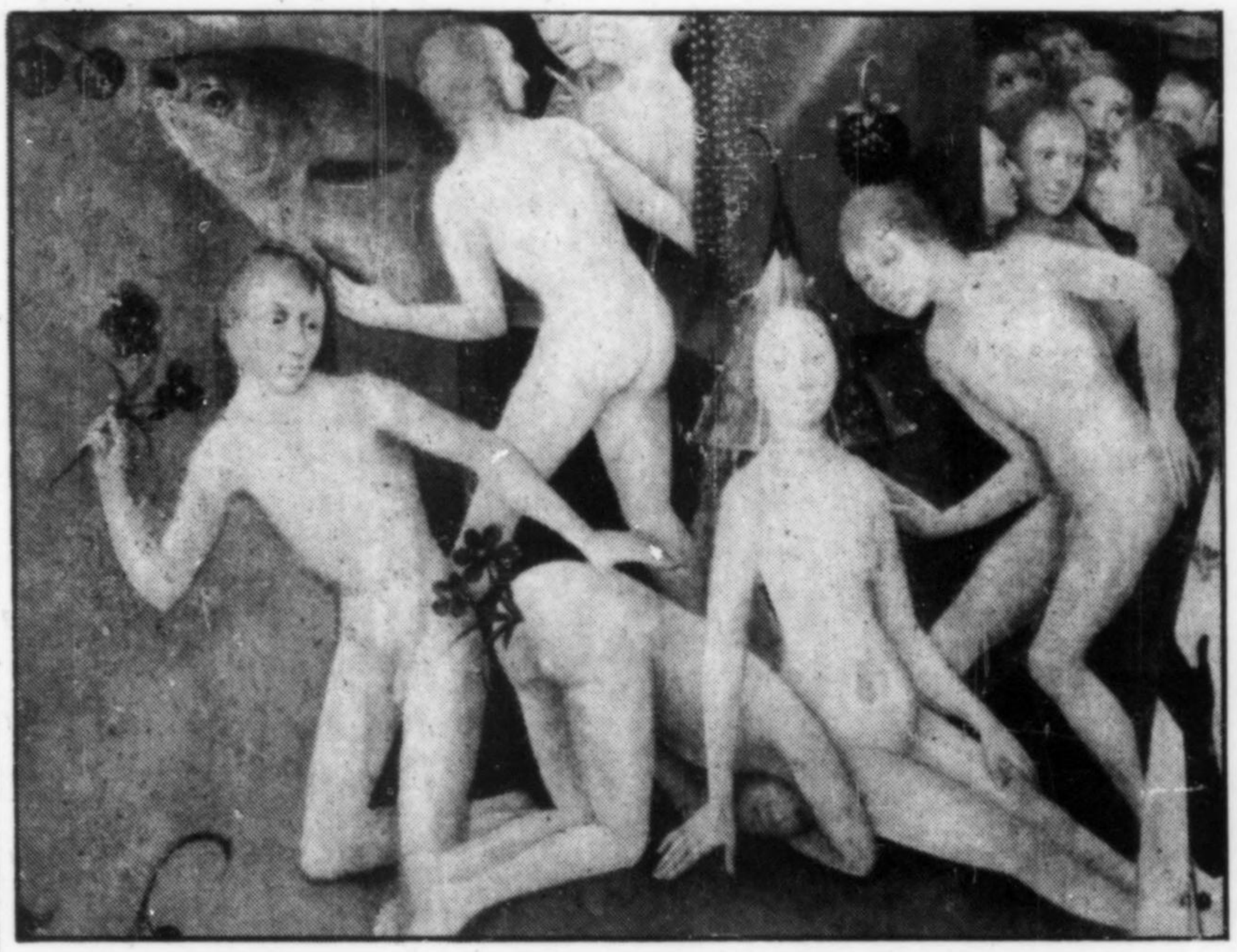

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Welfare Watch

The gift wrap

Tony Lynes finds a legal tangle in the Christmas box

A number of benevolent funds have decided not to pay their customary Christmas bonus to needy pensioners this year because, under DSS regulations, it would be clawed back by weekly deductions from income support payments. At first sight, the income support rules regarding charitable payments look reasonable. Occasional one-off gifts are treated as capital, which means that they are ignored unless the recipient's capital, including the gift, is over £3,000.

Regular charitable payments, however, count as income, of which the first £5 a week is ignored and the rest is deducted from the person's income support entitlement. Payments made at longer intervals than one week are treated as income spread over a similar period. Thus, a regular annual payment of £52 normally counts as income of £1 a week for £52 weeks.

If the only regular charitable payments a person receives are annual lump sums of up to £260, equivalent to a weekly payment of £5 or less, his or her income support entitlement will not be affected. The benevolent funds' dilemma is that, because they are already making payments of £5 a week or more to people on income support, the regulations as interpreted by the DSS leave no room for regular additional payments at Christmas.

However, an appeal tribunal might well accept the argument that a Christmas bonus is not like other annual payments. The regulations say that if a payment is "payable in respect of a period" it should be taken into account over a period of equal length. A Christmas bonus is paid "in respect of" Christmas week, since its purpose is not to help with year-round living expenses but to meet the additional expenses incurred at Christmas. It should therefore be treated as one week's income, not spread over 52 weeks. On that basis, if a pensioner receiving £10 a week in income support gets a bonus of £100, it should result in the loss of one week's income support, leaving a profit of £90.

The problem with this argument is that, if adopted by the social security commissioners and applied in all cases, it would result in less favourable treatment where the person concerned was not receiving weekly charitable payments. At present, s/he is allowed to keep the whole of a Christmas bonus of up to £260. That would cease to be the case if the bonus were treated as only one week's income.

The simplest way to cut through the legal tangle would be for government to amend the regulations so that Christmas presents in cash, to a reasonable limit, would be ignored, whether paid regularly or not. There is plenty of time to make that change before next Christmas.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward Bides-Awhile at Distant Point

Christmas comes but once a year to Bide-Awhile, the shop where, having fed their machines and themselves, motorway travellers linger, almost reluctant to leave the oasis, and gather up crisps, sweets, cigarettes, novelties and a great weight of newspapers and magazines.

For me, unfamiliarity gives the service areas on major roads the same romance that attaches to the lineside stopping points on the Trans-Siberian railway: little lonely depots where the locomotive takes on fuel and water, and where the passengers stretch their legs and buy in stocks of hardboiled eggs, cucumbers, bread, sunflower seeds and vodka for the next lap of the journey.

I envisage little settlements around the distant points where political exiles and people with a past to hide build log cabins, a wooden school for their children and a church for their souls, and timetable their lives around the sequence of arrivals and departures. Ancient towns and cities grew this way at crossroads and river junctions. Whatever happens in central Asia, our planning legislation makes sure that it can't happen at British motorway interchanges, where the service staff inevitably drive in on the nearside lane from the closest human habitation.

Actually, so travelogues tell me, even in the far east the sellers themselves board the train at the last recognisable place, and kip down in the guard's van, where they heat up their sausages, borscht and tea on little kerosene stoves. Once arrived at the lonely stop, they set up their own Little Chefs or Happy Eaters along the platform. And the nomads ride in on their camels or pack-horses from their seasonal camps, bringing cured skins, beadwork and richly-woven prayer mats.

Passengers buy them as souvenirs of the journey, or as presents for their grandchildren in Irkutsk or Akademograd, while picking up sugar-candy and the metropolitan papers from the itinerant equivalents of the Drover's Rest or the Welcome Break.

The transient moment at Distant Point would be celebrated by the purchase of some little object of carved soapstone, ram's horn or pinewood, to sit on a shelf of knick-knacks back home for half a lifetime. In the 19th century the same thing happened here. When changing coaches at the Cock or the Bull at Stoney Stratford or trains at Crewe, people would buy a bit of Goss china, the decorated boxwood known as Mauchline ware, or just a picture postcard of the place.

All these mementos of particular locations began as unconsidered trifles, and then became household junk. Slowly they were transformed into curios, then bygones and finally antiques. Collectors now seek out and trade in these transient keepsakes.

Today, down at Bide-Awhile, the staff drive in to cover the unsocial hours and unpopular weekend shifts, guided through remote control by the supervisor. Their big headaches, apart from that of ensuring that the right collection of supplements are inserted into the correct Sunday papers, occur when purchasers change their mind having seen the cash rung up. As noone can afford to trust anyone else these days, the assistant has to phone through to the supervisor for authorisation to repay 30p to a customer who objects to that price for a bag of crisps.

The real money is in impulse purchases of objects that confirm the fleeting visit. Normally they're stuck with authentic replicas of red telephone boxes, guardsmen, Highlanders or London taxis. But Christmas brings a brisk trade in seasonal novelties. At the bottom of the range there are Jolly Bendeers. These are moulded plastic reindeers with flexible wires through their limbs so that they can adopt the posture of your choice, at £1.50. Then at £3 there are fluffy snowballs on skis. You wind them up and they go round in circles. For the big spenders, at £13 (only one left at the time of writing) there is a Teddy Bear who, if you squeeze his paw, will sing Jingle Bells, Old MacDonald or Frère Jacques. A more recondite adult pleasure costs only £2 more. This buys you a pot of Plastic Flowers that Wriggle. If you shout or sing or whistle loud enough, their stems slowly girate.

Children coming into Bide-Awhile discover that if you put the singing Teddy in front of the Wriggling Flowers, you can make the one operate the other.

Buy now, while stocks last, but keep them unworn in their original polythene bags. History tells us that if you can store them long enough, the cycle of taste will ensure that, like fairground plasterware, clay dolls, tinware toys, Dinky and Matchbox models, all this instant rubbish will be seen as a charming epitome of the 1980s by the collectors' markets of the 2030s. Hold on to it, unless by chance you have other things to think about.

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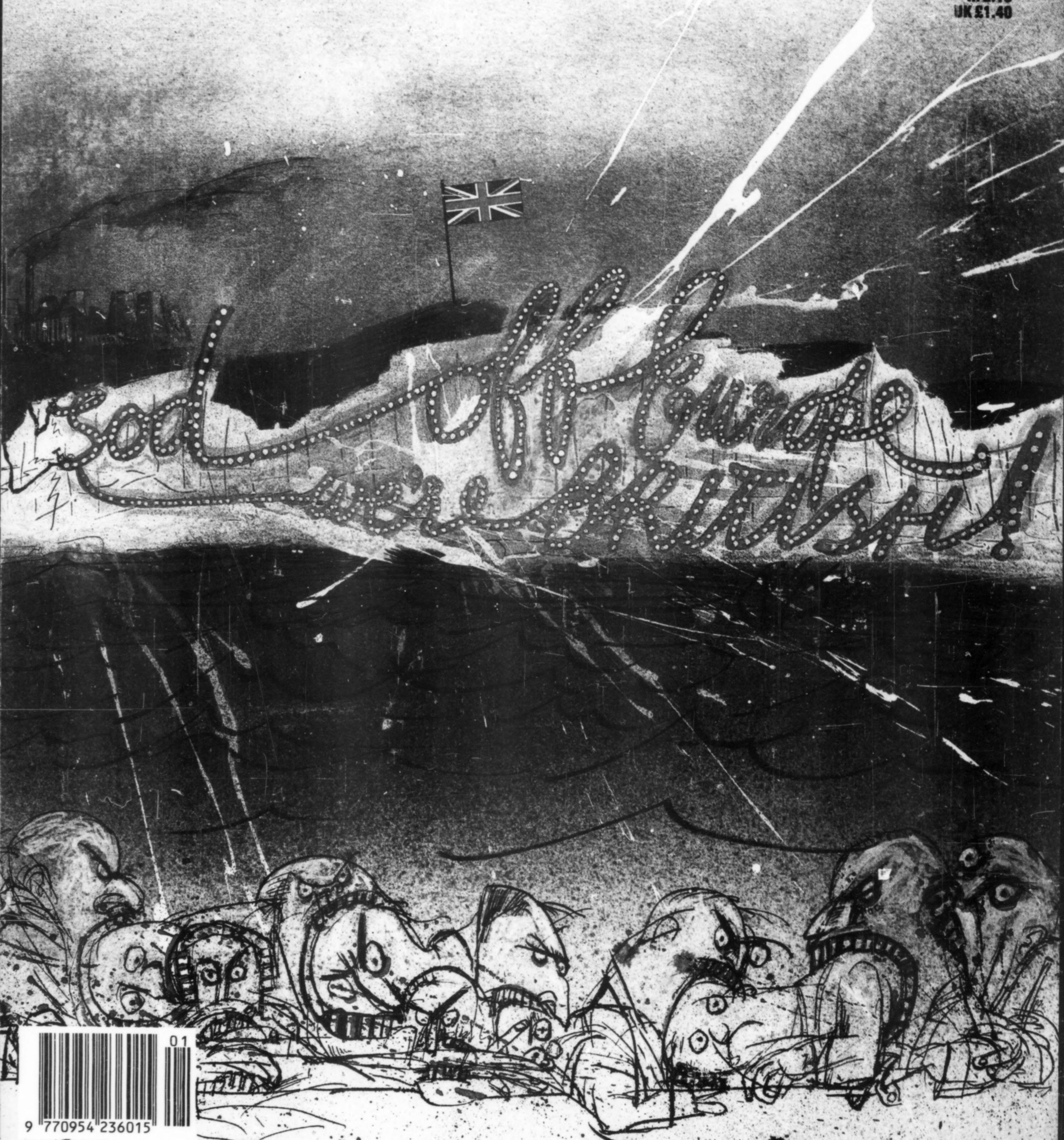
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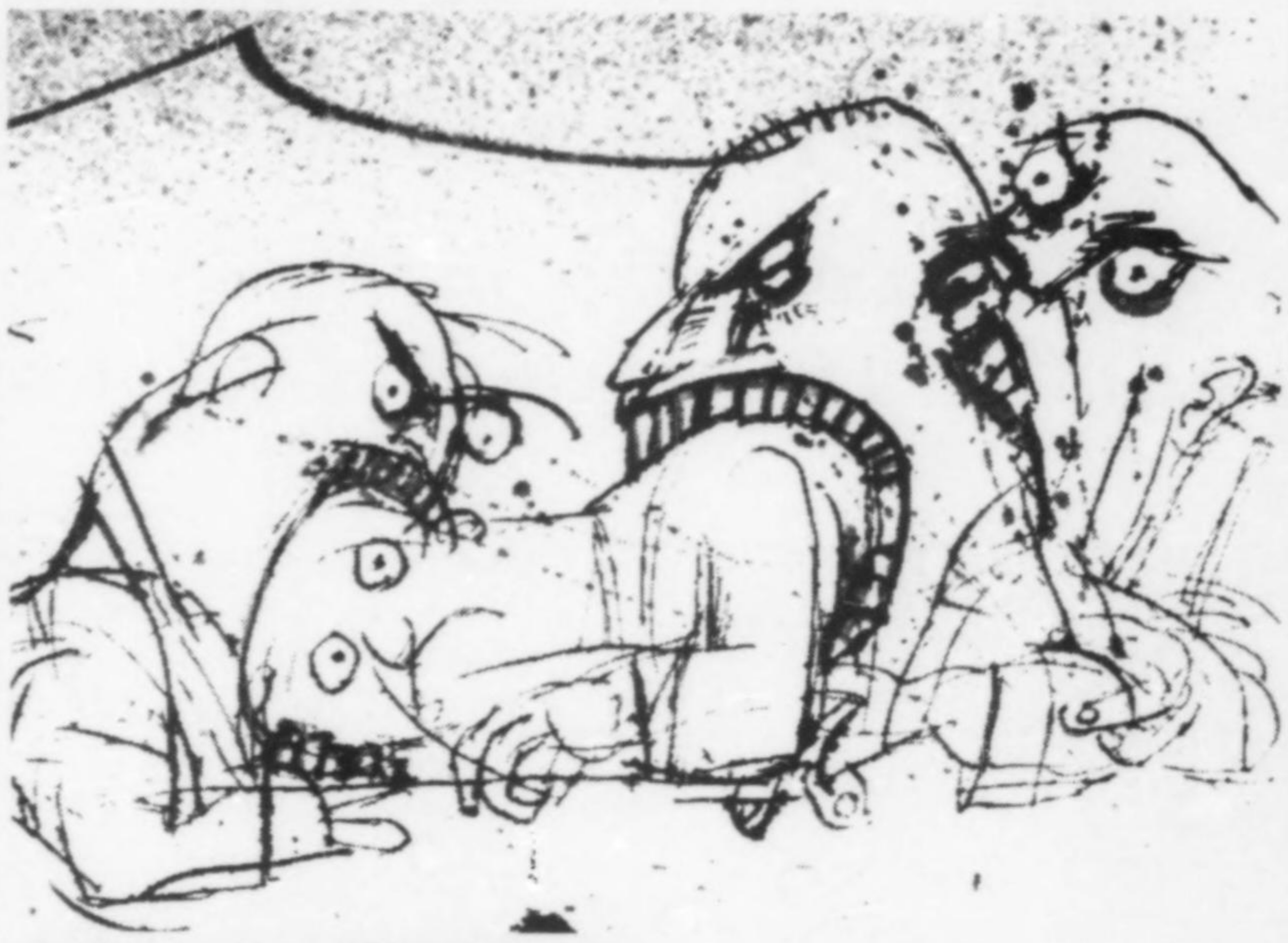

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Welfare Watch

Include them out

Illegal restrictions have cut the social fund again, says Tony Lynes

New evidence of the effects of the social fund's cash limits, which are to be frozen again next year, emerges from a report by welfare rights officers in the London borough of Southwark. As the demand for payment outstrips spending limits, the three DSS offices serving the borough have had to revise their scales of priorities. Proof of need is not enough to qualify for help.

The way the local authorities have set about narrowing the range of cases in which payments are made is illegal. Under the 1986 Social Security Act, social fund officers (SFOs) must decide each application on its merits, subject to the cash limits and any overall directions issued by the secretary of state. Priority lists drawn up by local managers can guide, but not supplant, the use of SFOs' discretion.

The Camberwell office, for example, announced in August that community care grants would in future be made only where the applicant or a member of the family was elderly, mentally ill or handicapped, or chronically sick or disabled. This implied a ban on payments to homeless families, women in refuges, young people leaving care, discharged prisoners and people being resettled after treatment for drug or alcohol problems—all groups who, according to the guidelines, are eligible for grants.

A complaint by local MP Harriet Harman resulted in a review of all applications affected by the ban and substitution of "highest priority" for "only". But the practical effect is the same. The Camberwell SFOs' budget is not enough to cover even the three highest priority groups. For anyone else, discretion might as well not exist. Similar unlawful restrictions have been imposed on SFOs at the Southwark office. Budgeting loans can only be made to people who have been on income support for six months or more, but local guidelines have extended the waiting period to a year.

The Southwark office has also imposed a blanket ban on grants for travelling expenses, which can normally be made for three purposes: to visit someone who is ill, to attend a relative's funeral, or to ease a domestic crisis. As the report says, an instruction from DSS headquarters to deny people the means of attending a relative's funeral would be unacceptable. So it is left to local office staff to make such decisions.

It remains to be seen for how long SFOs will accept this responsibility. It would be more honest, and fairer to SFOs, if the secretary of state—assuming that he is not prepared to give local offices enough money to make a reality of discretion—issued instructions limiting social fund payments to the narrow range of needs that can be met out of the present local budgets.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward shudders at our allotted roles as victims or executioners

In a recent High Court libel action, Nigel Nicholson, a former publisher and Conservative MP, told the jury of his experience in May 1945 when he was an intelligence officer in the First Guards Brigade. He and other British officers locked thousands of Yugoslav men, women and children into cattle trucks at a station in southern Austria, telling them that they were going to Italy.

The train was then boarded by Tito's partisans and "it was then that the really horrible moment arrived, when they began hammering on the sides of the trucks and reproaching us with having betrayed them". He reported to his superiors that his soldiers undertook this "unsavoury" task with the utmost distaste. He was ordered to rewrite his report and submitted another a little later which contained "not a word of truth". He was "disgusted" by the order and now thought he should have disobeyed it.

Every war is full of such horrors, carefully written out of history. Vast numbers of Europeans played a similar role, packing the trucks at wayside stations, and have ever since shared the same regret. The machinery of the state ensures both their complicity and the elimination of the events from the historical record.

The state, everywhere, relies on popular silence about the outrages involved in maintaining its authority. Hence the inability of people, anywhere in the world, to bring to justice the death squads of the previous regime. The record has already been changed, and the survivors have every reason for keeping silent.

It's nothing at all in the numbers game, but the example on the doorstep all my life has been the 342 people executed with the utmost legality under the authority of the Army Act between 1914 and November 1920 for desertion, cowardice and so on. Since this was done as an example to the rest of the first world war army, most veterans had some vague knowledge of it, as had most war-resisters who were threatened with the same fate. For everyone else it never happened.

When the dance band leader Victor Silvester died 12 years ago, the author of *The Monocled Mutineer*, William Allison, revealed that he had left behind an account of his involuntary involvement. A month before the mutiny at Etaples in 1917, Private Silvester was found reading a list, intended for officers only, of the men to be executed. The general told him: "I am not going to punish you but you will be detailed to take part in the next five executions."

Silvester recalled that "the first man I had to shoot was a private in my own regiment, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders… Mortified by the sight of the poor man struggling, 12 of us raised our rifles unsteadily. Some of the men, unable to face their ordeal, had got themselves drunk overnight. The tears were rolling down my cheeks as the victim went on struggling to free himself from the bonds tying him to the chair. I aimed blindly and when the gunsmoke had cleared away we were further horrified to see that, although wounded, the intended victim was still alive. Still blindfolded, he was attempting to make a run for it still strapped to his chair. The blood was running freely from a chest wound. An officer stepped forward to put the finishing touch with a revolver held to the poor man's temple. We learned later that in fact the victim had been suffering from shell shock." Victim and executioners were teenagers.

After taking part in four more executions Silvester said: "I was screaming in my sleep and physically sick every day, I was put into a military hospital and strapped down to the bed to stop me running away." If he had run away, no doubt he would have found himself in another group of victims. As it is, his posthumous memoir only gained publicity because he had become a show-biz celebrity.

That generation is now dead. In the intervening years, apart from the effect of the Official Secrets Act, the files have been weeded out and destroyed. But the same sense of historical rectitude that has led some people to seek out responsibility for the endless massacres of the second world war, whether at Auschwitz, in Polish forests or the gorge outside Kiev, has impelled Julian Putowski and Julian Sykes to search casualty records, newspapers, war diaries and lists of those not entitled to medals, to compile *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act* (Wharncliffe Publishing, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, S. Yorks S70 2AS, £15.95).

Like every other wartime tale, it's a story of the inarticulate, poor and ill-educated, whether bewildered conscripts, Jews, Ukrainians or Serbs. The victims are rounded up for death by the confident, well-educated and articulate people who run the show on every side and are amply capable of eliminating the record to ensure that *no one* can call *them* to account.

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Welfare Watch

An ill wind

Tony Lynes shows how sick pay has lagged behind earnings levels

In what now passes for public consultation, the social security advisory committee wrote to selected bodies on 7 December 1989 inviting comments within three weeks on a government proposal to save £70-80 million a year on statutory sick pay (SSP). The main change is in the level of earnings above which employees are entitled to the full SSP rate. At present, this is paid on earnings of £84 a week or more; from April, this figure will rise to £125. To sugar the pill for low-paid workers, the lower rate of sick pay is to be increased to £39.25, a magnificent 25p more than is needed to compensate for inflation. But the higher rate is to rise only from £52.10 to £52.50—an inflation-adjusted cut of £3.55 a week.

SPP is paid by employers but reimbursed by the DSS. A cut in SSP, therefore, benefits the exchequer, not the employer. In fact, most of the £70-80 million saving will be borne by employers, because most people receive their full basic pay when off sick. Where this happens, the change will simply mean a lower rate of reimbursement to employers. But part of this cost will fall on workers whose employers pay only SSP for periods of sickness—especially those caught in the £84-£125 earnings band to which the higher SSP rate will no longer apply.

The government's excuse for the change is that, since SSP started in 1983, the level of earnings (then £65 a week) qualifying for the higher rate has been raised annually in line with prices, while earnings have risen faster than prices. The equivalent of £65 at today's earnings levels would be about £116. The reason given for choosing £125 rather than £116 is that employers pay higher national insurance contributions on earnings over £125 a week.

This belated recognition that the logical basis for uprating earnings-replacement benefits is an index of average earnings, rather than prices, deserves half a cheer. To qualify for a full cheer, the same principle would have to be applied to the benefit rates themselves, not just the levels of earnings at which they are payable.

What would that mean for SSP? In 1983, there were three SSP rates payable on different bands of earnings. If the rates of payment as well as the earnings bands had risen in line with average earnings, SSP from this April would be £48.50 on earnings up to £87 a week, £60 between £87 and £116, and £72 over £116.

In other words, to restore SSP to its 1983 levels in relation to earnings would mean additional increases of £9 a week for those earning less than £87, £33 for those earning £116-£125, and about £20 for everybody else. That is the background against which the government's proposals must be judged.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward seeks Nowhere somewhere

In the anniversary industry the great thing about 1990 is that it marks the centenary of William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. Dismissed for decades by socialist academics as sentimental mediaevalism, it stands out today as the least authoritarian and most relevant criticism of capitalist values in the whole vast library of utopian visions, and as the one which appeals most to modern green and feminist awareness. On one test after another, with key issues like making work enjoyable, or giving children a place in the economy rather than in a ghetto called school, Morris challenges all our assumptions.

Paul Thompson provided the best of all modern interpretations in his book *The Work of William Morris* (coming out again this year from OUP), where he commented that: "Socialism was originally the product of the age of the factory, and it bears that mark in its primary focus upon work. This is the major reason why socialism has always had a more direct appeal to men than to women, and eqally why, with the growth of leisure and a home-centered way of life, its significance to ordinary life has become less and less obvious. But Morris stands alone among major socialist thinkers in being as consistently concerned with housework and the home as with work and the factory. The transformation of both factory and home was equally necessary for the future fulfilment of men and women. Morris wanted everyday life as a whole to become the basic form of creativity, of art."

Just as salutary for us is Morris's own mode of production. He didn't spend years researching utopias. He just wrote his novel in instalments on Sunday nights as a serial story for next Friday's issue of the socialist weekly *The Commonweal* between 11 January and 4 October 1890. Before the days of "instant" book production, book publishing was far more instantaneous. Roberts Brothers of Boston, with neither airmail nor fax to help, actually got it out as a book in 1890, followed by Reeves and Turner in London in 1891 and Morris himself in the beautiful Kelmscott edition of 1892. Desktop publishing was a reality a century ago when there wasn't a barrage of editors and word-processors between writer and reader.

Ideas too flowed more freely before we had intellectual "disciplines". Busy, hardworking Morris absorbed the usual homegrown mentors like Carlyle and Ruskin, and exotic imports like Marx and the refugees from the Paris Commune and Tsarist Russia. Nearer at hand, in the same *Commonweal* in June 1889, an obscure young engineer, Raymond Unwin, had described the Sunday outing of the Chesterfield socialists to an early 18th century house, Sutton Hall, in words that sound as though they had slipped out of *News from Nowhere*:

"Small wonder that, as we stood looking at the house and the splendid view that it commands, we should fall to talking of the 'days that are going to be', when this Hall and others like it will be the centre of a happy communal life, each one having his own den upstairs… and downstairs would be large common dining halls, smoking rooms—if indeed life shall still need the weed to make it perfect. And we chatted on, each adding a bit to our picture; how some would till the land around and others tend the cattle, while others perhaps would start some industry, working in the outbuildings or building workshops in the park, and taking care not to spoil our view…"

This creative recycling of the inheritance of the past was in the minds of those colleagues of Morris who founded the Commons Preservation Society, the National Footpaths Preservation Society, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty.

Ironically, what really happened in the "days that are going to be" was that under the banner of the National Trust, the aristocracy stayed on as custodians of their great houses while the rest shuffled reverently around the loot of ages, like *moujiks* in their felt boots doing the Winter Palace heritage trail.

The legacy of *News from Nowhere*, and of other serialised socialist best-sellers of the period like Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England*, was endlessly distorted, watered down or absorbed into bureaucratic managerialism. Raymond Unwin, for example, became the first architect of the first garden city at Letchworth, then of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, but finally the mentor of government housing policy which became progressively estranged over the decades from popular aspirations.

Wouldn't it be refreshing if we celebrated the centenary of Morris's little masterpiece by wiping away our automatic sneer about his irrelevance in the era of the microchip, market values and cheap labour in the Far East, and began to work out our own dreams of the kind of society in which we would really like to live, and how we propose to get there? Read the book to discover what might happen next.

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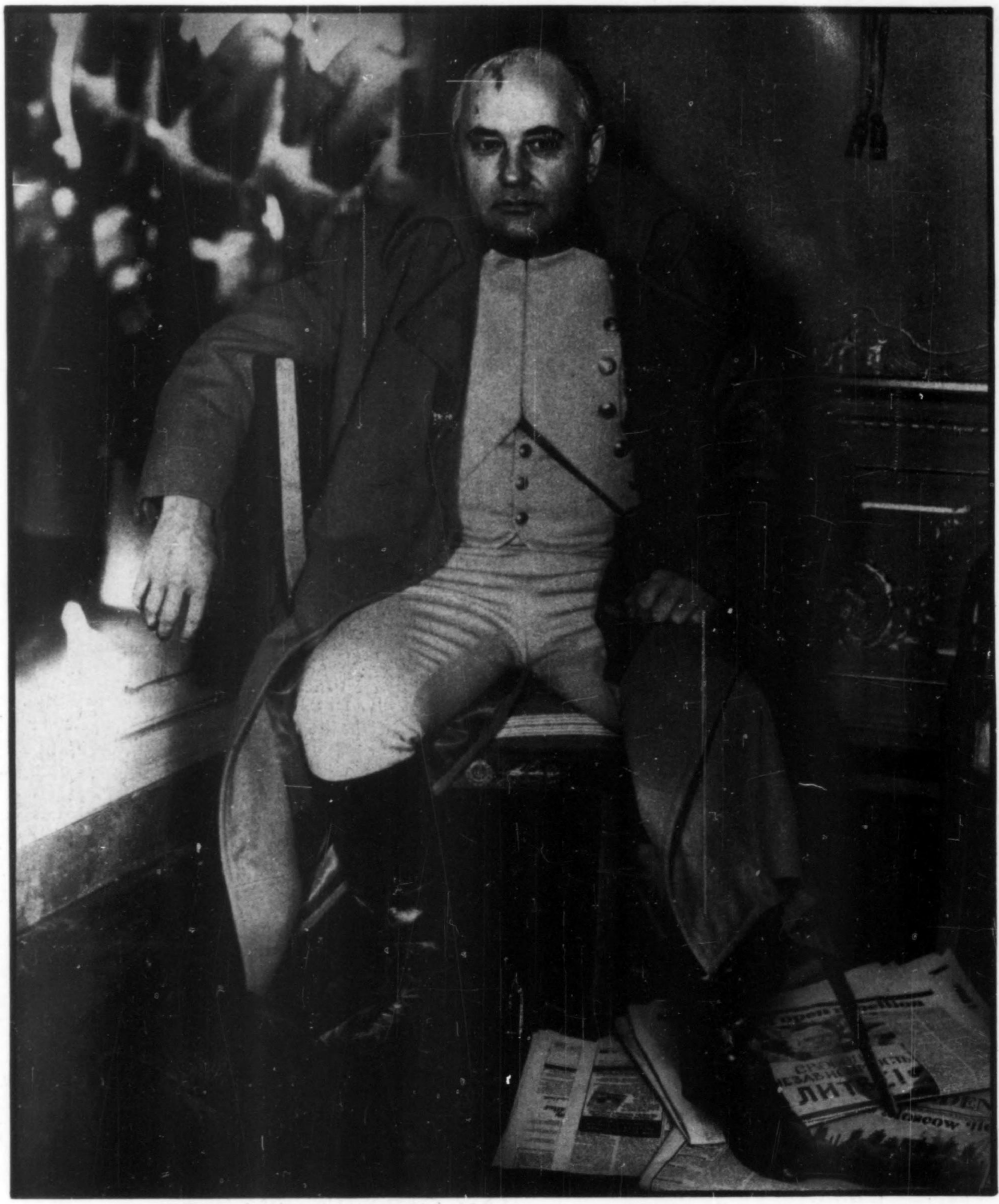

Under siege

Will Gorbachev play the man of iron to save the revolution?

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Cut rates

The disabled lose millions from new benefits, says Tony Lynes

Changes in disablement benefits announced last week (*The Way Ahead*, HMSO, £7.50) will, the government claims, add some £300 million to spending on long-term sick and disabled people by 1993-94, "when the improvements are fully implemented". But the package, needless to say, includes cuts as well as improvements. By the time the cuts are fully implemented, there will not be a £300 million increase in spending but a net reduction of many times that amount.

The biggest increase results from combining attendance allowance and mobility allowance into a new disability allowance from April 1992. There will be a lower rate, £10 a week, for about 140,000 people needing care but unable to satisfy the attendance allowance conditions, and for about 150,000 (in some cases the same people) who fail to qualify for mobility allowance. As now, mobility needs will be recognised only if they arise before age 65. So, some people will still lose £26.25 a week (the 1990-91 mobility allowance rate) because they qualify a day too late.

An underlying theme is that the elderly are doing well enough and improvements must be concentrated on the younger disabled. Thus, from December, those disabled from childhood will get an age-related invalidity allowance at the top rate of £10 a week, as an addition to the severe disablement allowance (at present it is paid only to those receiving a contributory invalidity pension). Some 50,000 partially incapacitated people of working age will benefit from a means tested and self-financing "employment credit", starting in April 1992.

And now for the cuts. Invalidity pensioners now get an earnings-related addition based on earnings from 1978 on. This is to be phased out: earnings after April 1991 will not count. This, the white paper says, will save £350 million a year by the end of the century. What it fails to mention is that the savings will rise to over £3,000 million a year at today's prices.

The white paper is similarly modest in its estimates of savings from the abolition, next autumn, of the reduced earnings allowance for victims of industrial injuries and diseases. Only new claims will be affected, so here too the savings will increase year by year. The white paper mentions that the industrial disabled will lose £40 million a year by 1992-93, but not the longer-term annual saving of about £200 million.

Nobody expected the long-awaited review of disability benefits to result in a spending bonanza, but cuts of this magnitude suggest that the disabled rank very low in government priorities. Perhaps it's no accident that the chancellor, John Major, is an ex-social security minister.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward goes in search of a railway guide

Experience tells us, when we see TV campaigns for a state-owned industry, that it's a build-up for a sell-off. So, when BR revived its 1988/9 campaign, a rewrite of W H Auden's *Night Mail*, rhyming commuter with computer, it was an unmistakeable signal.

But look at the shelves marked Transport in any bookshop or public library. While you will find a vast range of fully illustrated books on every aspect of railway operation, you will discover nothing at all about railway *policy*, whether BR's own changes or the present government's intentions.

For that huge specialist literature, and its market, is entirely devoted to the past. It caters for steam nostalgia, although the early years of diesel locomotives are by now long enough ago to have generated their own enthusiasts. Nothing on the shelves informs the citizen who believes in railways as the safest and least environmentally damaging form of inland transport, and is concerned for their future.

In saying this, I do a slight injustice to Ian Allan Ltd, biggest of the specialists, who for 40 years have published the *Railway World* yearbook. They have just brought out *Beeching: Champion of the Railway?* by R H M Hardy, a defence of the man who, appointed to make British Railways profitable, adopted the simple device of cutting out the unprofitable lines. It's a book with many insights for those who aren't just buried in the pre-Beeching era.

Beeching's report on *The Reshaping of British Railways* is more than a quarter of a century old. Perhaps even he qualifies as nostalgia. For he did, after all, declare to a union conference: "I see the railways as a national asset, owned by the nation and therefore to be used in the best interests of the nation as a whole, not simply in the best interests of the employees, nor of its users, nor to make a profit for the owners—you and me, the taxpayers."

Today, at a time when there is an intense debate behind the scenes on the future of BR, there is nothing on sale in the bookshops to enable citizens to take part. The Department of Transport issues statements that Richard Hope, editor of *Railway Gazette*, roundly calls "a gross and deliberate deception of the public". In cutting grants to BR, the unspeakable Cecil Parkinson told MPs: "To subsidise a service for which there is excessive demand is a very silly way of using national income." British Rail itself conducts relations with the public through a mendacious thicket of PR professionals. A foreign visitor would assume that we already have three railway systems: InterCity, Provincial and Network SouthEast.

You have to consult outside pressure groups whose publications never reach the shops to learn what is in the air. Several years ago, for example, TEST (Transport and Environmental Studies, of 177 Arlington Road, London NW1 7EY) produced for Transport 2000 a detailed two-volume study called *BR: A European Railway*, to indicate lessons from the rest of the continent. The latest truth, with the Transport Secretary's newest announcement, is that BR will be the highest-priced and least subsidised railway system in Europe.

Since we have learned that government policy is made by right-wing think-tanks like the Adam Smith Institute, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Institute of Economic Affairs, a necessary service has been provided by Paul Salveson in summarising the options that they have put before an eager government. This is in his book (not in your local bookshop either, unfortunately) called *British Rail: the radical alternative to privatisation* (Centre for Local Economic Strategies, Alberton House, St Mary's Parsonage, Manchester M3 2WJ, £3.95).

Mr Salveson's book has many other functions. He knows that the clever young men in the pressure groups can be just as myopic as any ordinary steam buff in idealising the "big four" railway companies (LNER, LMSR, GWR and SR) nationalised under the Transport Act of 1947, or even the host of independent railways that were "grouped" as a result of the Railways Act of 1921. If a free market is the aim, he reminds us that as long ago as 1872 a parliamentary inquiry found that "there is now no active competition between different railways in the matter of rates and fares", and that in 1892 the railway cartel was described as "monopoly in the guise of competition".

In a foreword, Jimmy Knapp warns us against the "pervasive nostalgia for a mythical pre-war heyday of the railways". Paul Salveson too stresses that those who see the railways as a national asset should not be pushed into an automatic defence of the current aggressively commercial BR structure. He reminds us that we don't have to reject the separating of infrastructure from operations just because the Adam Smith Institute recommends it. The notion works well in Sweden and Switzerland. But his over-riding demand is for "a new management culture". How right he is!

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Chasing men for maintenance won't make them better fathers. And it won't make poor mothers richer.

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Pension peril

Bribes have almost bankrupted public funds, reports Tony Lynes

The Prudential reports a 26 per cent rise in new business in 1989. The government actuary reports that the national insurance fund's predicted surplus of £519 million for 1989-90 has turned into a deficit of £957 million, with worse to come in 1990-91; when, without action, the deficit would reach an estimated £2,725 million (Cm. 948, £3).

The two results are not unconnected. A large slice of the Pru's new business consists of 225,000 personal pension schemes, sold to people contracting out of the state scheme. Each of these schemes results in a reduction of national insurance contributions. In addition, the national insurance fund has to pay the Pru a contribution of 2 per cent of the individual's earnings between the lower and upper NI contribution limits (£46-£350 for 1990-91)—the bribe which the government assumed was needed to induce people to privatise pensions.

The explosion of so-called personal pensions (about as personal as sliced bread) was entirely unpredicted. The government actuary admits that his last report, only a year ago, assumed there would be 750,000 schemes in force in 1988-89, of which 600,000 would get the 2 per cent bribe (people transferring from employers' pension schemes do not qualify).

In the event, there were 3.1 million, nearly all qualifying for the bribe—four times as many schemes and five times as many bribes as were predicted. By April 1990 the total is expected to rise to four million. The cost to the NI fund, in lost contributions and bribes, is now running at well over £2 billion a year and still rising.

The effect on the fund is potentially catastrophic. Without remedial action, its reserves would run dry by 1993. The obvious solution is to raise NI contributions by about 10 per cent. This would make it embarrassingly clear that all contributors were being made to foot the bill for a bribe to a minority. So the government has resorted to creative accounting.

First—a once and for all windfall—the redundancy fund's accumulated balance of about £1 billion is to be transferred to the NI fund next year. Next, the social security bill, which had its second reading on Monday, provides for the NI fund to be relieved of the cost of a number of benefits which do not depend on the person's NI contribution record: statutory sick pay, statutory maternity pay and industrial injury benefits. These will be tax-financed from 1990-91 on, saving the fund £1.9 billion that year.

None of this should conceal the fact that £2 billion a year of public funds are being siphoned off into private pension schemes of a highly speculative nature. If you wonder what this has to do with targeting, ask the Pru.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward is invaded by magical realism in the pheasantry

It was an everyday story of country folk in January at 2am. I went to bed at midnight and had drifted into sleep over a vast Latin American novel I was inspired to read after watching Mike Dibb's powerful TV kaleidoscope of that continent. The rest of the family was glued, to John Boorman's *Deliverance*, also on TV, about what happened when a bunch of ordinary guys went shooting.

Vaguely I heard urgent footsteps, the shifting of heavy furniture, muttered curses and the opening and shutting of a window. It became linked in my mind with the day the earthquake hit Tres Marias, just at the time when Esteban Trueba was spending sleepless nights debating whether it was beneath his dignity to breed chinchillas for the fur trade. I dozed off again but then heard the sound of the vacuum cleaner absorbing the detritus of the earthquake.

In the morning I learned that one of the cats had caught a hen pheasant. Incredibly, she had dragged it through the catflap and, in a rare joint venture with the other cat, also female, had harried it up the stairs until the bird found refuge behind the old elm chest. Ben had the task of rescuing the bird and releasing it into the night, with a dreadful loss of feathers. I went in search of the maimed bird but never found it. Somehow it had fluttered away, an easy target. It was a reminder of the way shooting game birds has spread down the rural hierarchy.

A huge slice of "country heritage" revolves around land-owners and their mania for hunting and shooting. The same story's underside tells of poverty-stricken families and their desperate attempts to gather food and income from trapping, snaring or shooting birds and animals. It is a centuries-long saga of ruthless class war between rich and poor, punctuated by executions, transportations and hard labour in prison. John MacGregor should certainly include the death squads employed by the gentry as part of his national curriculum for British history.

Small farmers here were always involved in shooting, and so were their employees. Rabbits, hares and pigeons were a meance to their crops and were also food for the generations who reared cattle, sheep and pigs but could seldom afford to eat them. Shooting as sport was a hobby for the rich. Shooting for food was confined to tenants and their employees in the agricultural depression that lasted from the 1870s until the second world war.

The new affluence for farmers since then has enabled them to emulate the rich. Even before the current ironies of "set-aside" payments, some of them had begun to rear partridges and pheasants for organised shoots, and to salvage or replant little woods and coppices for this purpose. County conservation officers, knowing that the way to the farmer is through his pocket, have actively encouraged this. The same people who got subsidies for grubbing up hedges and eliminating copses, could now pick up more public money for replanting, as well as cheap young labour to do the job.

Our farming neighbours now buy in young stock for shooting from specialised hatcheries. They even conquer their individualism to join forces in employing a game-keeper who feeds and polices the birds on one of those wide-tyred three-wheel motorbikes.

In the autumn, just before the killing-field season started, Harriet was driving down the lane and found her path obstructed by a platoon of partridges, wandering without any fear across the road. They knew that humans, even in vehicles were friends who lovingly nurtured them, put down poison to eliminate their enemies, and kept a watch for marauders. How could they know that in just a few days men with guns would pay £300 a day to be driven around in Range-Rovers to make war on them?

One night, parked in the lay-by, was a van full of corpses in pairs, just like a rack of coat-hangers in Marks & Spencer. It isn't done for food. You can buy the birds retail at £2.50 a brace, but it costs about £12 each to rear them. It depends on the eagerness of an incredible number of people to pay for the privilege of killing tame birds, once they have been scared into taking to the air.

But the worst aspect of the business, apart from losses of crops and produce, is its effect on human relations. A new kind of barking relationship evolved when the new game rearers met *anyone*, whether footpath users or employees, wandering around on *their* land.

Everyone is suspect. In the new paranoia of the shooting business, the humblest walker must be chased off. What are they doing on our patch? If they aren't poachers in disguise, they must be irresponsibly disturbing the breeding grounds. Why should they think they have a right to gather blackberries?

Those damn birds are so innocently friendly. So the magical realism of the South American *hacienda*, where you warn off on sight any roving stranger, has been imported into cosy, welcoming East Anglia.

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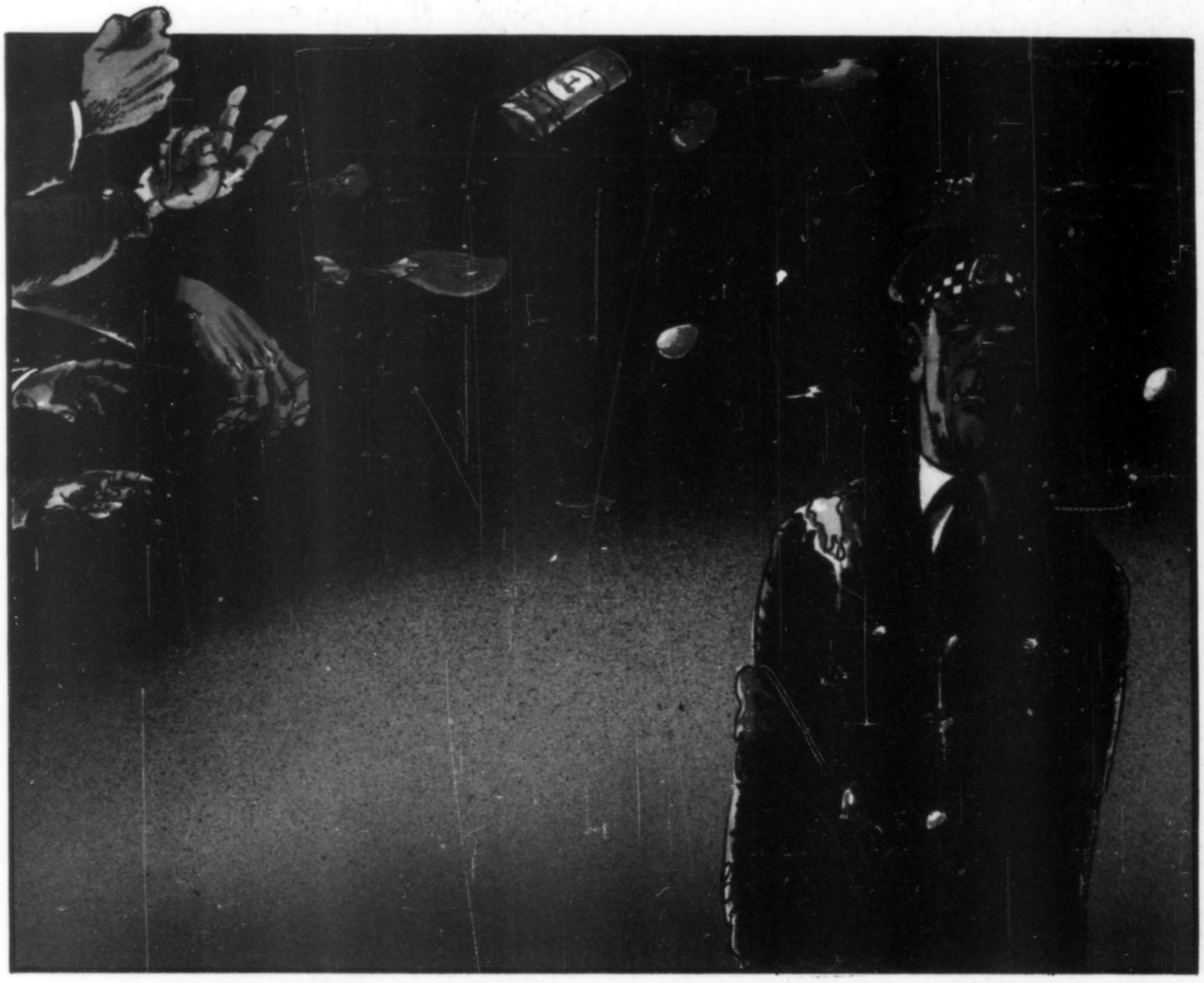

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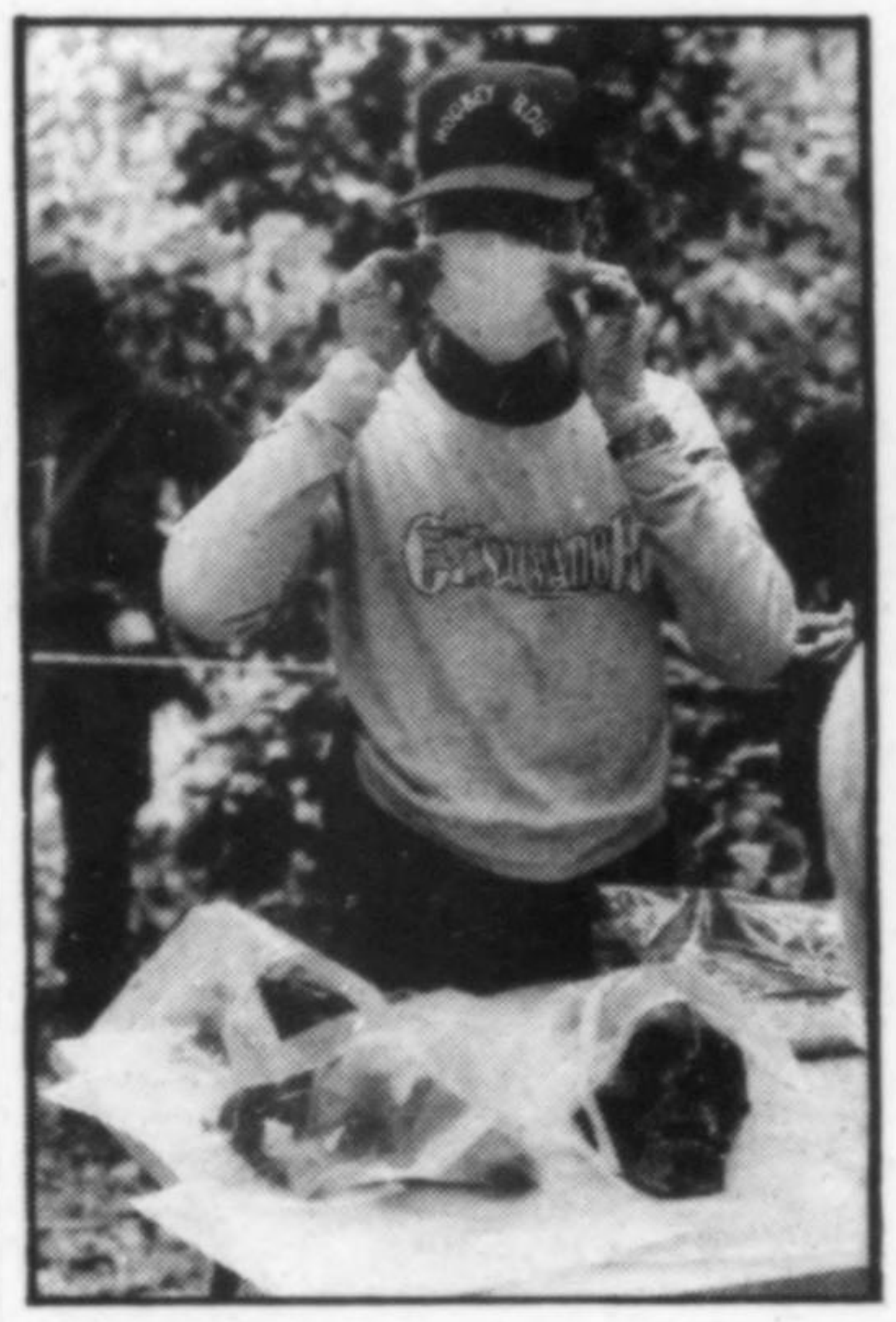

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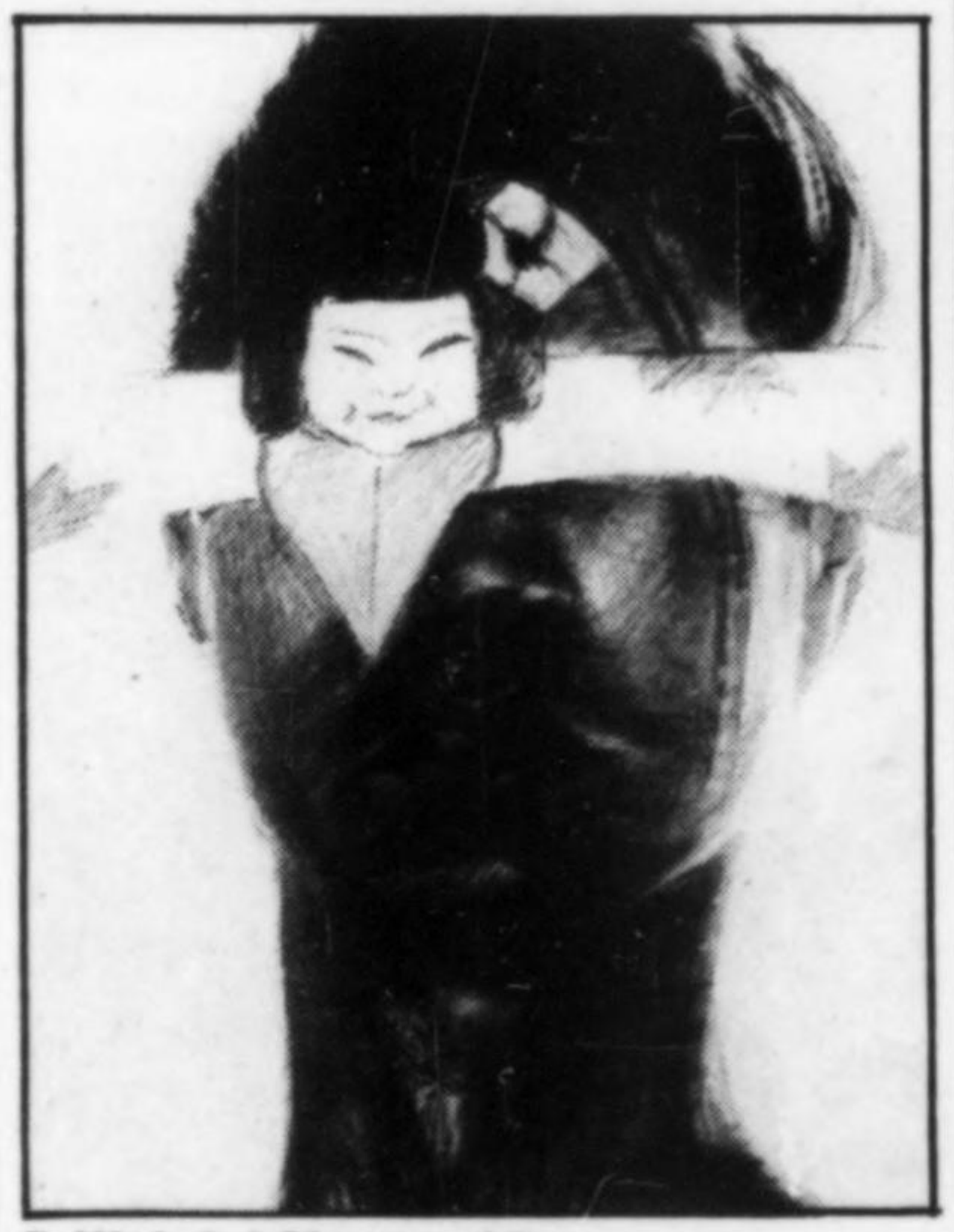

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Welfare Watch

Final payments

Tony Lynes on the benefit that carries a death sentence

A year ago, social security minister Nicholas Scott promised to make attendance allowance available to terminally ill people without the normal six months' waiting period. Clause 1 of the social security bill, which a Commons standing committee started debating yesterday, fulfils that pledge.

In some ways it is unexpectedly liberal. Anyone terminally ill would qualify for attendance allowance, from the date of claim, at the higher rate normally reserved for those needing both day and night care. But there are problems. "Terminally ill", for this purpose, means that a person can reasonably be expected to die of a progressive disease, such as cancer or Aids, within six months. There is no precedent for such a condition in social security, or any other legislation.

Its effects are unpredictable, but doctors' estimates of life expectancy tend to be optimistic. A doctor whose patient could, with luck, survive for several years will be reluctant to advise that death is likely within six months. By not doing so, however, he may deny the patient the possibility of home care. He may also face the resentment of the patients' family if his optimism, which may have cost them £1,000 or more in lost allowance, proves ill-founded.

Attendance allowance normally has to be claimed by the patient, not by the carer, but the government proposes that anyone should be allowed to claim for a terminally ill person, even without his or her knowledge. Again, there is no precedent for such legalised deception. The intention is humane, but it could misfire. Most people may be totally ignorant of the benefit rules, but a minority will get the message when they are awarded an allowance they have not claimed without the normal delay.

Such problems are inevitable if entitlement is to depend on the expectation of death. The obvious solution is to get rid of the six-month waiting period for all claimants. Short-term sickness could be excluded by paying the allowance only where the need for attendance was likely to be prolonged. But this would still mean relying on the doctor's crystal ball.

Alternatively, the waiting period could be reduced. The government already intends to reduce it to three months in 1992. Why not two months or even one? Cost would be the main objection, but it is also true that the terminally ill stand to gain more from clause 1, which exempts them entirely from the waiting period.

In short, clause 1 deserves a cautious welcome. A serious debate, in parliament and elsewhere, should follow on how the attendance needs of the terminally ill might be met without offering them a fixed contract of life.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward monitors the Swiss debate on arms

Everyone knows that there are more guns in American homes than in all the armies of the US, the USSR and NATO, and that the gun lobby can't be defeated because the second amendment to the Constitution says: "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to bear arms shall not be infringed."

We blame the US murder rate on those 200 million weapons. But we also know that Switzerland, with its very low murder rate, has weapons in every home. Every male between the ages of 20 and 50 *must* keep a rifle and ammunition in the downstairs cupboard. As Machiavelli explained, "The Swiss have no army. They *are* an army."

There are attractions about this. History tells us everywhere of the dreadful dangers posed by an élite army separate from the citizens. Look at Latin America or Africa today. It's a live issue in the current debate in Spain about conscription. "Who are we defending?" ask the ill-trained 18-year-olds. "Us", reply the socialist politicians, looking nervously over their shoulders at the phalanx of right-wing generals.

In the big powers, the sinister alliance of service chiefs and defence contractors has ensured a permanent war economy with ever more sophisticated and expensive weaponry, and consequently the professionals to use it.

This puts neutral Switzerland out on an antiquated limb. As Jonathan Steinberg says, in his absorbing answer to the question *Why Switzerland?*, "The modern Swiss army still has a vestigial atmosphere which goes back to the unruly crowd of armed, free peasants who slaughtered the flower of Burgundian chivalry by flailing at them with five-foot pikes." But "to attack the army is to assail the very identity and self-image of the Swiss people."

There's an ugly side. Not only are military and civilian life intolerably linked so that big businessmen are officers while small traders are privates. but there exists a macho gun culture and what Steinberg mildly calls Alpine bellicosity and ponderous camaraderie. Above all, there is the unwillingness to admit the rights of the political, moral or religious objector.

Constitutional changes are made by popular vote on the "initiative", needing 100,000 signatures, and the "referendum", needing 50,000. The first requires a majority of both citizens and cantons, the second a simple majority. In 1973, an attempt to win an amnesty for imprisoned conscientious objectors failed. In 1984, a very moderate initiative calling for a community service alternative to the army was defeated.

The dramatist Max Frisch is one of his country's gadflies and has written three times about the army in a mood changing from idealism to deep disillusion. In 1940 he wrote *Blätter aus dem Brotsack* (Knapsack Papers), about the experience of being a soldier maintaining a neutral haven while surrounded by Nazi expansionism. But, in 1974, came *Dienstbüchlein* (Service Record), a book which brought him intense dislike from fellow-citizens as it recorded unmentionable truths. Other soldiers, he recalled, couldn't understand what a clever chap like him was doing in the ranks. "From the workers' point of view, officers were genuinely educated or at least well off, hence entitled to lead troops and sleep in beds." Worse than that, he dared to mention that Switzerland had made some unpleasant compromises with the Nazi regime and that some officers openly sympathised with Hitler.

Last year, Frisch brought out another little book, *Schweiz ohne Armee?* (Switzerland without an Army?). It takes the form of an unwilling dialogue between the old man and his grandson, who wants to know whether he should jeopardise his civil career by remaining a corporal, or whether he should play along with mythology and seek promotion.

His oblique little book sold 60,000 copies in a few months and is now in its fifth printing. My Swiss friends complain that Frisch didn't push the argument far enough. In November the Swiss voted again, on the radical proposal to abolish the army. The measure was, of course, defeated. But my Swiss friends are jubilant, first because more than 36 per cent of citizens voted Yes, and secondly because 68 per cent recorded a vote. This is seen as a high turn-out. The issue was at last on the national agenda.

Swiss radicals have always complained that their political system ensures that nothing ever changes. On the other hand, they point out that such a referendum would be unthinkable in Britain, and that even if it were, far fewer of Her Majesty's loyal citizens would ever conceive of life without an army. They also gently remind me that a central government elected by a minority which proceeded to sell public assets, dictate what schools should teach, abolish those local authorities it disliked, and change the revenue basis for all the rest, would be totally inconceivable in Swizerland. Their complacent armed citizens would start rattling their rifles.

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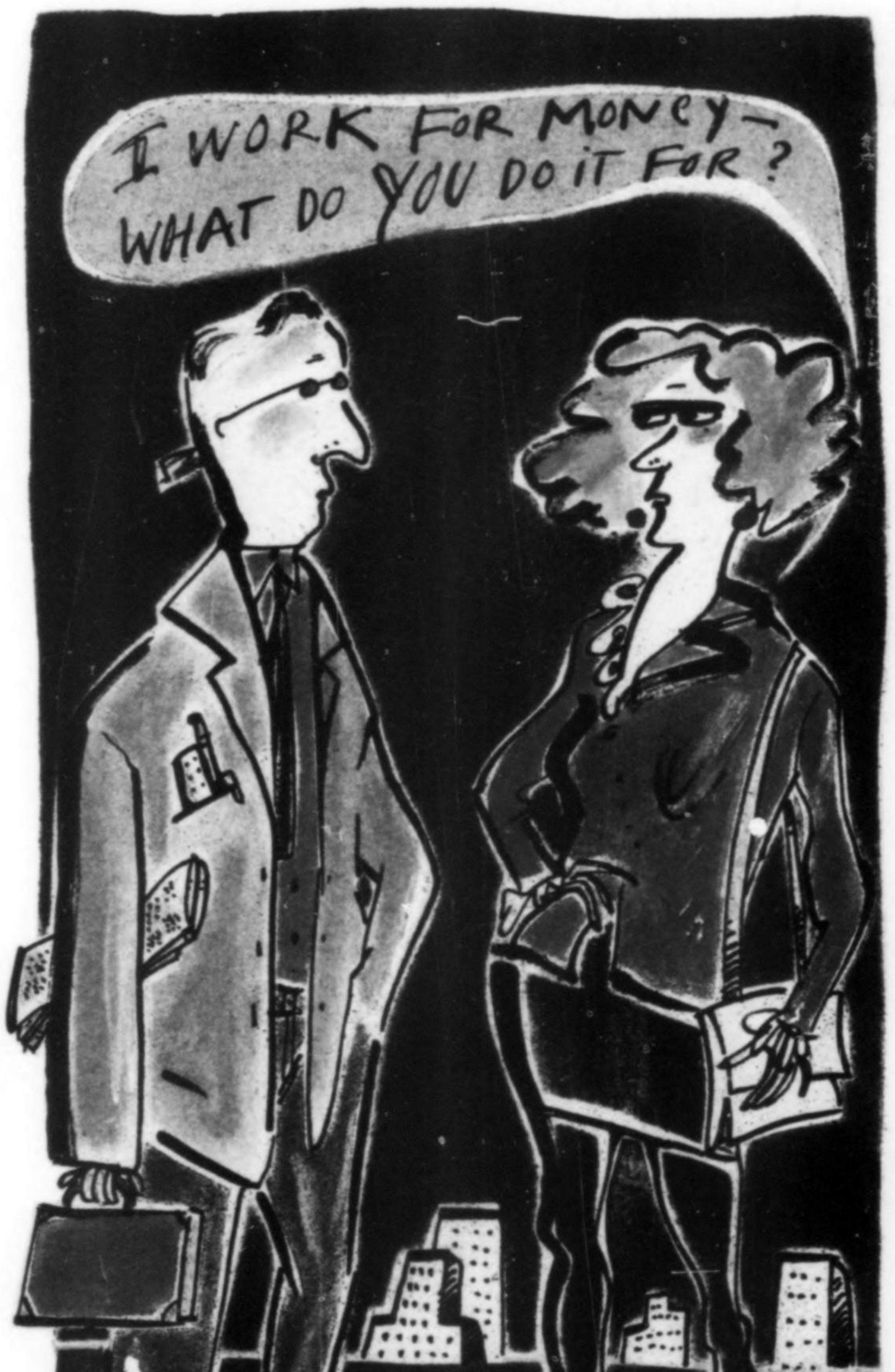
A brilliant career

Duncan Campbell: Colin Wallace, Clockwork Orange and Paranoia Gulch

Chinua Achebe: The Song of Ourselves

St Valentine's Day: Claire Armitstead, Sally Vincent and Angela Willans make love public


I WORK FOR MONEY— WHAT DO YOU DO IT FOR?

Jane was a nurse. Laura was thinking of social work or teaching. Both became prostitutes. They both find it more rewarding—and not just financially

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Welfare Watch

Sweet charity

Tony Lynes welcomes a change in the rules on money gifts

Welcome changes in the treatment of charitable payments to people on means-tested benefits were announced last week. Government policy on this question has always been ambivalent. The whole point of a means test is to restrict benefits to people without other resources. But a strict application of that principle would leave charities with no incentive to help the poorest sections of the community, since every penny of charitable help would be deducted from their benefits.

The present basic rule is that all but the first £5 a week of regular charitable payments are taken into account in full. As a result, charities are driven to exploit any loopholes they can find. They can, for example, make one-off or irregular payments, which are treated as capital and ignored provided the person's total capital remains under £3,000. Or they can make payments direct to a shop or other supplier, which are ignored provided they are not for basic needs like food, fuel and clothing.

Under the new rules, the basic £5 limit will be raised to £10. Before the limit was raised in 1988 it had been frozen at £4 since 1975. The 1990 equivalent of that £4 would be £13.

The second change is that charitable payments both intended and used for items other than basic needs will be disregarded, even if the money is paid direct to the person concerned and not to a third party. But we should realise that the new rule is simply a return to the policy followed both before 1980 and under the 1980 supplementary benefit regulations. It was dropped only in 1988, when income support replaced supplementary benefit.

The changes in the income support and family credit rules will come into force in April. In the case of housing benefit and the new poll tax rebates, the doubling of the £5 disregard will take effect in April, but the new rule on charitable payments for non-essentials will not apply to these benefits until October, to avoid adding to the problems of local authorities in the run-up to the poll tax.

Generous or not, the two changes will considerably widen the scope for charities to supplement the incomes of people living on income support or on a combination of low earnings and family credit, and will allow them to do so in a more dignified way. The charities' ability to take advantage of the changes will, however, be limited by the growing demands on their resources from other benefits changes—in particular the government's persistent refusal to raise the real value of benefits in line with other incomes, and the increasing inability of the social fund to meet the demands made on it.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward cherishes the culture of the back yard

Of all life's fringe benefits, the urban back yard is by far the most significant, touching the lives of all the family. The Victorian housing reformer Octavia Hill, who was wrong about a variety of things, was certainly right in her opposition to the provision of blocks of flats rather than individual dwelling houses.

In a marvellous passage she observed how "The creepers in the back yard, the rabbits the boys feed, the canary the sickly child listens to, the shed for the man's tools, the washing arrangements, or the arbour, are all arranged to suit individual tastes, and for all these the separate house, or the small house, gives scope."

This was in her contribution, in 1892, to the third volume of Charles Booth's monumental *Life and Labour of the People of London*. And we're all familiar with the individual tastes this patch of ground liberates: the back yard stuffed with tubs and pots and hanging baskets full of flowers, or decked out like a country station full of railway memorabilia. John Raynor remembered his father's ambition to turn the narrow walled garden at the back of number 3 Little Dean's Yard in the shadow of Westminster Abbey into a little wood of country trees. After summer holidays it was slowly filled with two oaks, an ash, two mountain ashes, a beech, an elm and a birch. He doesn't record what neighbours said, but for the family it was "a place of great magic, adored by each child in turn".

Most backyards are less romantic but have the same incalculable value: a playpen, a playground, another room for the overcrowded house, and finally a workshop.

It's bad luck if your neighbour is a panel beater, but backyard industry was there long before the factory system and survives into the allegedly post-industrial age. Take Spitalfields, for example. When Dickens observed the silk-weaving trade 150 years ago, he found no traces of London there: "It is as if the Huguenots had brought their streets along with them, and dropped them down here." And 50 years later outside observers described how the same streets had turned into the *shtetlach* of Lithuania, Galicia or Bessarabia: peasant villages in the backyards of the rag trade.

Today both inhabitants and their detractors think it should be called Bangla Town. After all, Manchester and the City of Westminster regard their Chinatowns as a tourist feature. Brick Lane too, has its smart exotic restaurants. Tenacity and mutual aid have triumphed against racism and municipal neglect. The enemy today is the phalanx of city property developers, bulldozing the backyard culture.

A century ago, Beatrice Webb, again surveying the area for Charles Booth's survey, and in spite of her criticism of the sweatshop system, wrote that "Between factories proper and home work lie a class of home workshops: they are usually built in the yard or garden behind the dwelling house, sometimes connected with and sometimes detached from the house... It is applicable to industries where no power machinery is needed and it is a great improvement on employment in city houses."

Her view is echoed in the latest study of the same streets: *Spitalfields: a battle for land* (Hilary Shipman, £7,95). The author, Charlie Forman, who has worked in the area since 1973, notes with dismay how the former Labour council sought to drive the workshops out, and remarks that "The Spitalfields Small Business Association has tried to keep the mixed use of houses and workshops in Hanbury Street and Princelet Street. In this way, men can use their sewing machines in the workshops at the back of their gardens. They can take the children to and from school, do the shopping, pop home for lunch and generally keep in touch with their family in the way that they are used to. The planning department has tried, and fortunately failed, to get the Association to move its workshops elsewhere. Given what's happened to land prices, the workshops must stay where they are or cease to exist."

The backyard economy has been the mainstay of the Banglandeshi people, just as it was for the Jewish immigrants and just as it was for the Huguenots. The planners' objection to it is frivolous: it doesn't fit their cartographic technique. Charlie Forman remarks, correctly, that "Spitalfields doesn't fit neatly onto a map where each land use is coloured separately—shops, houses, workshops don't divide up in the way planners are taught they should."

The speculators' objection is far more sinister. Here is cheap, run-down land with occupants with no political clout. Any deal with the local authority providing some alleged "planning gain", like a handful of low-rent flats or flatted workshops, will make it ripe for new offices. Sure, we'll throw in a shopping galleria. Just pass over the planning permission.

It's a sordid tale of the entrepreneurial culture and its contempt for the back yard, and for the way people have scraped a living for centuries.

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Lippy kids

Black english is well bad. Standard english is serious lame. Listen to the kids who mix styles and idioms, and make language their own. Promiscuity reigns, and not the Queen's English

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Paul Morley settles down to thirtysomething; Cosgrove meets Robbie Coltrane

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The migrants' metropolis: London, Rushdie and race

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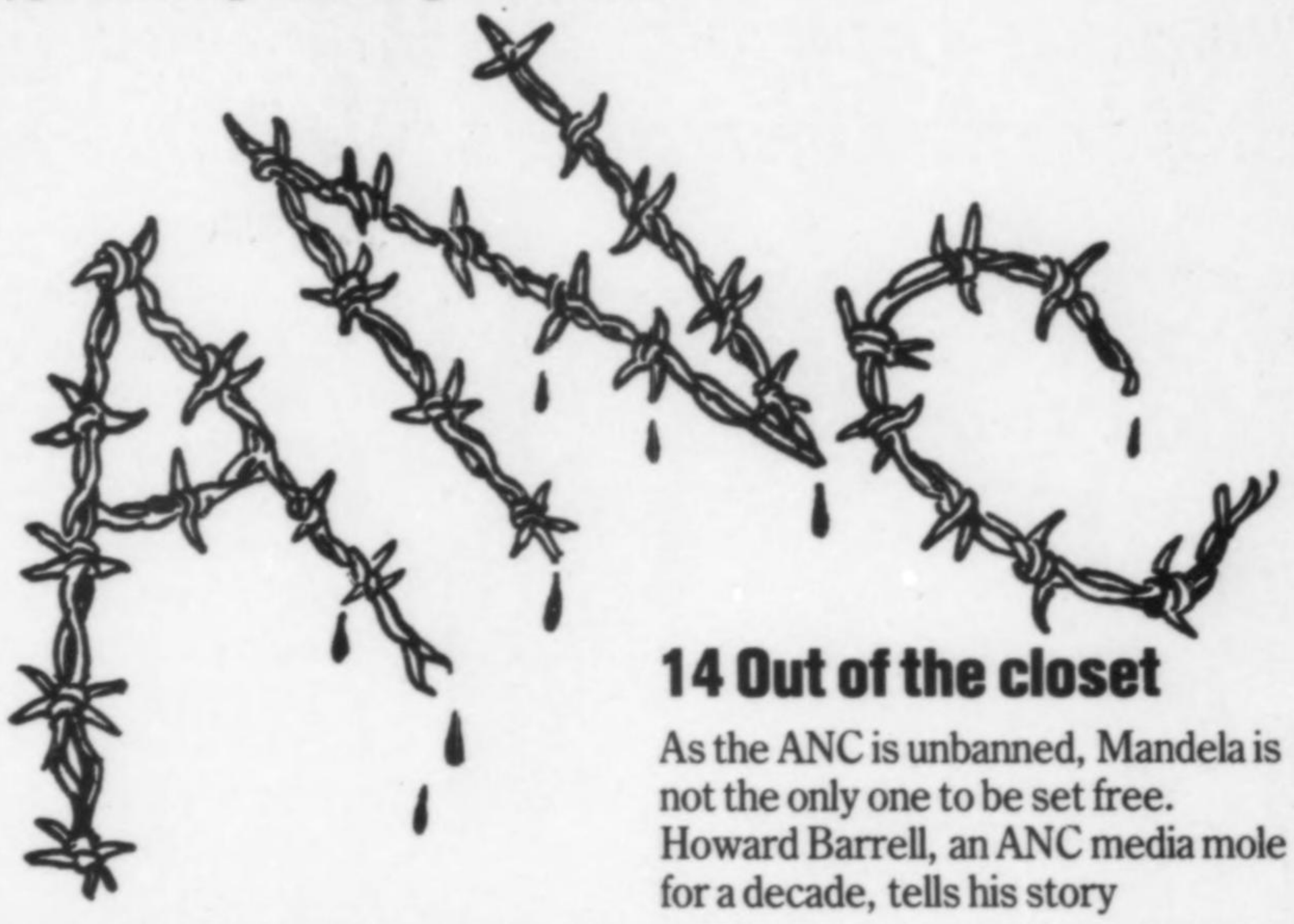

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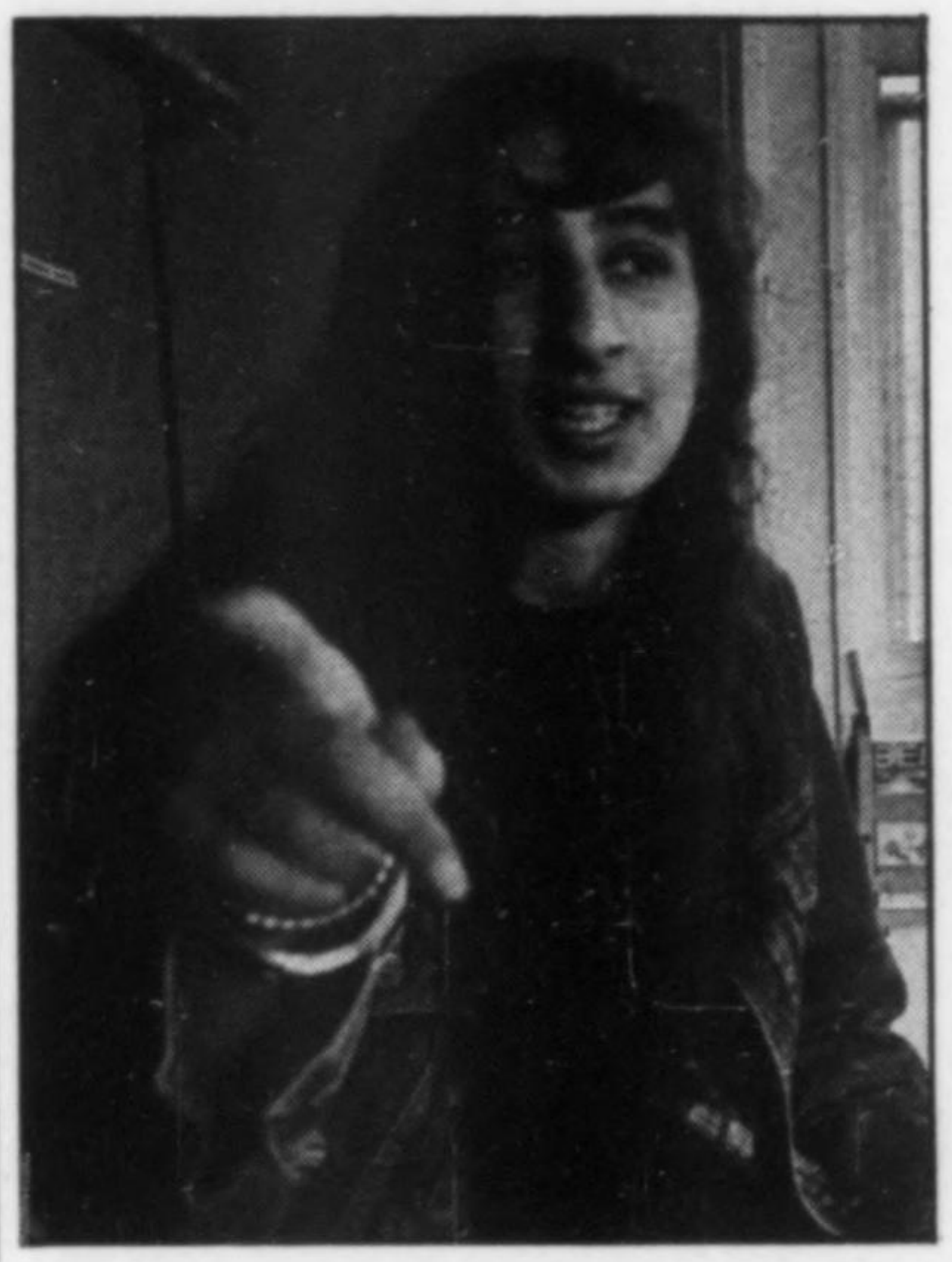

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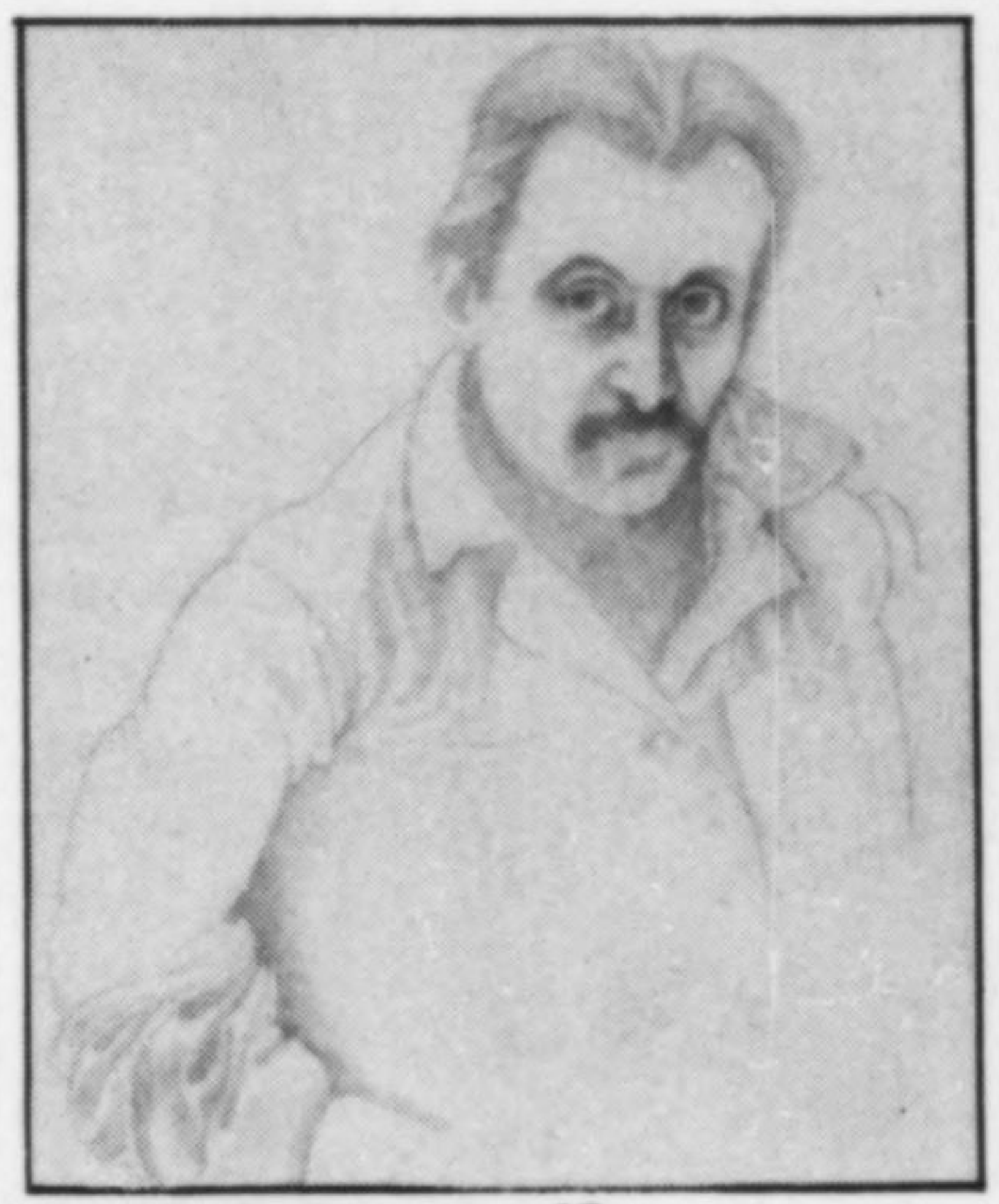

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Welfare Watch

Axed to death

Injured at work? Forget about special benefits, warns Tony Lynes

At the advanced age of 41, the industrial injuries advisory council has published the first general report on its work (*Periodic Report No.1*, HMSO, £4.20). It is a sad document. Industrial injuries insurance, of which Britain had good cause to be proud when the Attlee government introduced in in 1948, has been gradually dismembered in the 1980s.

A table in the report summarises the processs. Injury benefit, for those forced to take time off by an industrial accident or disease, was scrapped in 1983. Industrial disablement benefit, which compensates for loss of faculty, was abolished in 1986 for such "minor" injuries as the loss of one or two fingers and for the vast majority of industrial diseases—about 90 per cent of cases in all.

At the same time, the additional allowance for loss of earnings capacity, which used to continue for life, was cut by 75 per cent after pension age. Other additions to disablement benefit were erased in 1987. Industrial death benefit followed in 1988. And from this September, up to five years' disablement and other benefits will be clawed back by the DSS out of any compensation paid by an employer.

The advisory council, representing both sides of industry, strongly opposed these changes. Since the report was written, it has delivered a strong protest to the Secretary of State, Tony Newton, against yet another cut, which was debated this week by the Commons committee on the social security bill: abolition of the reduced earnings allowance (REA).

One reason why the government has been able to dismantle the industrial injuries scheme with little public opposition is the widely held view that benefits should no longer be based on the cause of disability but only on its effects. This would be a respectable excuse if disparities were being reduced by levelling up other benefits, but there is little sign of that.

The abolition of REA is an example of how the government, on the pretext of robbing Peter to pay Paul, robs both. The reason for abolition given in the white paper *The way ahead* (see *Welfare Watch*, 19 January) is the "anomalous overlap" with invalidity benefit, payable where a disabled person cannot work.

The only possible overlap with REA is the earnings-related addition, introduced by the Labour government in 1978. Yet REA and the earnings-related addition to invalidity benefit are to be abolished by successive clauses of the social security bill.

Once this bill becomes law, there will not be much of the industrial injuries scheme left to cut. The advisory council could be the next target if it persists in airing its views in public.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward sees a pearl in the grit of Edinburgh's oyster

For me, Edinburgh doesn't mean David Hume or Adam Smith, nor Stevenson, Deacon Brodie or Jekyll and Hyde. It's not even the city of the Anglo-ascendency, high-life, the Festival, heroin, homelessness or gay judges.

It is the city of a 19th century marine biologist from Aberdeenshire, Patrick Geddes. He was one of those people who buttonhole you in the street, walking, talking and waving his arms around: an erratic, disorganised and overbearing genius who anticipated every one of our late 20th century preoccupations, from the energy crisis to women's liberation.

In 1886 he settled in one of the tenement slums of the Old Town with his wife, Anna, organised the installation of bathrooms and hectored the city councillors on the folly of demolition when the poor had nowhere to go. He then bought a slum and turned it into the first self-governing student hostel in Britain. After that he bought the Outlook Tower with its *camera obscura* at the western end of the Royal Mile to create a "sociological museum and laboratory" through which the citizens could comprehend their city. All this with borrowed money.

Shunned as a charlatan by the academic establishment, Geddes left behind at least three dumps of indecipherable papers, beyond those which were simply put out for the refuse collector. One is at the National Library in Edinburgh, another in the University there, and yet another at Strathclyde.

Maybe his best legacy to Edinburgh was in an oration at the end of the first world war: "The central government says 'Homes for heroes? We are prepared to supply all these things from Whitehall; at any rate to supervise them; to our minds much the same thing.' But are they? Can they? With what results, what achievements? At present we have the provinces all bowing to Westminster, where they are granted doles; so the best people leave for London. They send their money to Westminster, which (after ample expenses have been deducted) is returned to some of them in the alluring form of a grant. But why not use this money themselves in the first place? Why not keep your money, your artists and your scientists, your orators and your planners—and do up your city yourselves?"

Geddes stuck together a town planning exhibition which toured the world and was sunk by the German cruiser *Emden* during the first war. But the book that it coaxed out of him, *Cities in Evolution*, was read in 1915 by a 20-year-old New York student, Lewis Mumford, who died last month aged 94. It was a revelation. It introduced him to thinkers totally outside the academic pale: to Ebenezer Howard the garden city pioneer, and to Elisée Réclus and Peter Krokpotkin, anarchist geographers.

In the 1920s Mumford met Geddes and later described how the old man saw him as, and almost confused him with, the cherished son lost in the first world war. The poignancy of the situation was brought back to him by his own similar loss in the second.

But Mumford was the vehicle through which a range of ideas outside any student's syllabus were brought back into circulation. He began in 1934 with *Technics and Civilisation*, elaborating the way Geddes had adapted the vocabulary of archaeology to categorise the phases of technology. *Eotechnic* covered water power and the use of timber and stone, *Paleotechnic* the age of coal and iron, and *Neotechnic* our own world of light alloys, plastic and electricity. This remarkably relevant book was partially reprinted by Freedom Press in 1986.

He followed it with *The Culture of Cities* in 1938, a book which changed many readers' assumptions about the city states of the Middle Ages, and was later completely rewritten as *The City in History*, still around as a Penguin. Later came a third volume, *The Condition of Man*, but Mumford's postwar legacy is best found in a dozen books analysing trends in architecture and planning.

By the time he thought he had retired, the horrors of American foreign policy led Mumford back to commitment and denunciation. Later books like *The Myth of the Machine* and *The Pentagon of Power* put into its context of centralised and irresponsible authority—United States military involvement in south-east Asia.

Geddes once lectured the Co-operative Wholesale Society on socialism which, he implied, meant that "until everything and everybody is ready for the millennium, nothing can be really got ready at all." On the other hand, "co-operation does the daily duties which lie nearest, refuses no bird in the hand today for the sake of two in the bush tomorrow, and thus not only lives and grows, but daily strengthens toward larger tasks; since, in fact, getting a bird in the hand today is the best practice for getting two out of the bush tomorrow."

Unexpected disciples like Mumford spent a lifetime trying to resolve this issue. But the rest of us haven't coped with it either.

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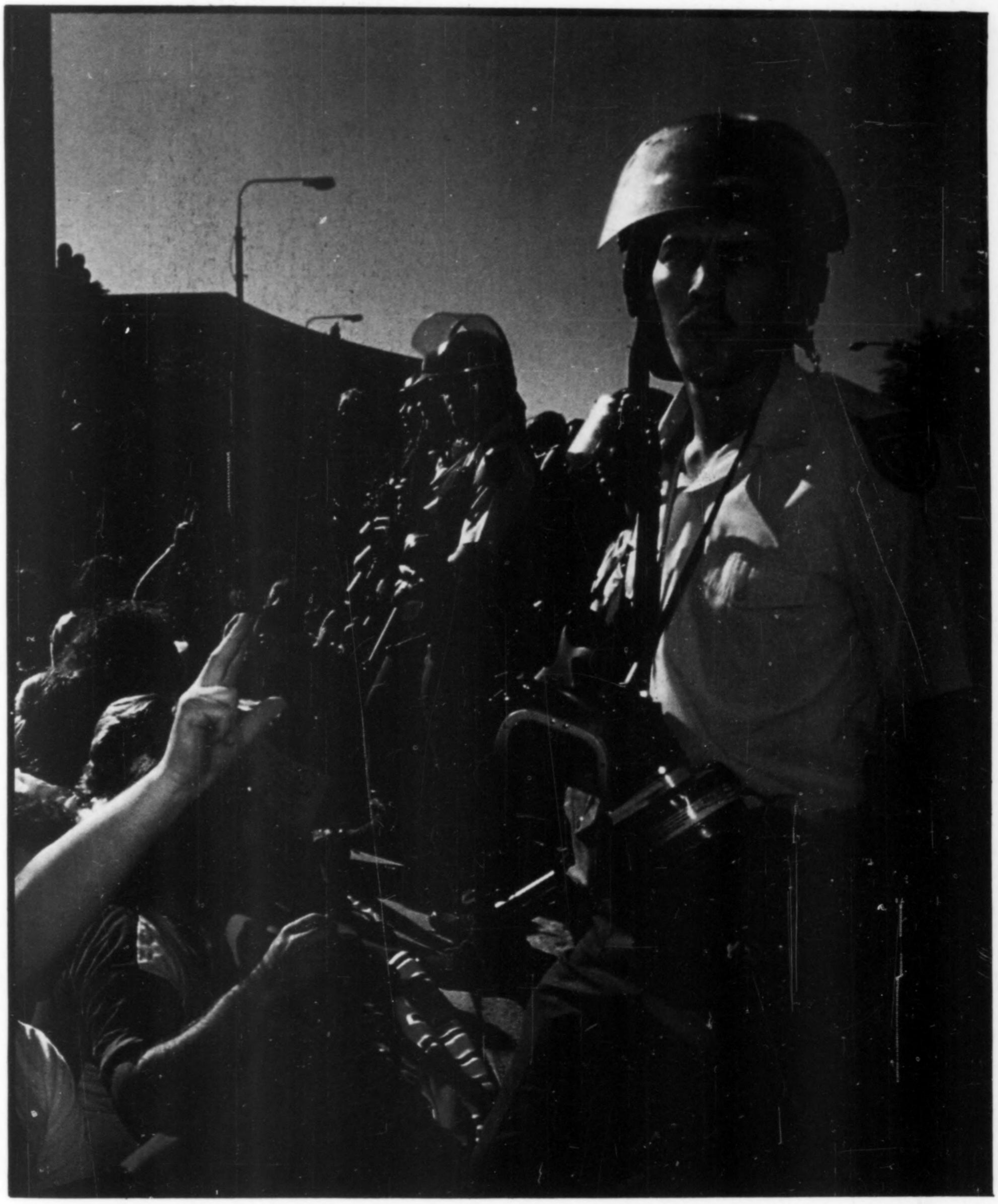

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Welfare Watch

Exclusion zone

Only the happy few will get proper sick pay, says Tony Lynes

The benefits bulldozer rolls on relentlessly. Last week, with the help of the Commons committee on the social security bill, it demolished a large block of long-term sickness benefits, built only 12 years ago.

The victim of this latest act of vandalism is the earnings-related addition to invalidity benefit. Payable after six months of sickness, invalidity benefit consists of a basic flat rate payment of £43.60 a week, a small age-related addition, and an earnings related addition based on earnings from 1978 on.

The average earnings-related element is now only about £9 a week, many of those receiving it having had little opportunity to build up entitlement since 1978. For new claimants, however, it is worth far more. A man with average male earnings from 1978 on, claiming invalidity benefit in 1990-91, would get £33.85 a week, and the corresponding figure in 2000-01 would have been £66.35 (both at 1989-90 prices).

The effect of the bill is that earnings after April 1991 will not count towards the addition. Instead of doubling by the turn of the century, it will rise to only £40.15 and will then fall year by year as the period 1978-91 forms a diminishing part of claimants' working lives.

The goverment offers two excuses. The first is that the long-term saving—officially £1.3 billion a year by 2025-26—will provide, as the minister Nicholas Scott put it, "room for manoeuvre in the next century". This is sheer fantasy. Social security ministers fighting for extra resources in 2025 will get no credit for cuts made 35 years earlier.

The second excuse is that earnings related invalidity benefit is not needed because nearly 60 per cent of employers are now covered by long-term occupational sick-pay schemes. That claim is based on a survey by IFF Research published in 1988 (*Occupational Sick Pay Schemes*, £6.25 from DSS, PO Box 21. Stanmore, Middx. HA7 IAY).

What the survey actually showed was that nearly all public sector employees had some form of long-term sickness cover, but only 39 per cent in the private sector. Nearly half the large manufacturing firms' schemes excluded manual or non-salaried workers. Over a third of schemes excluded the first six-12 months' employment, and many excluded sickness caused by pre-existing conditions. A more up-to-date survey would no doubt add Aids to the common exclusions.

All of which suggest that the number of private sector employees who will actually get long-term sick pay if they need it is nearer 10 than 60 per cent. Hardly a firm basis for abolishing the state scheme's alternative.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward salutes girl scouts, eighty years on

If I said I always had a soft spot for the scout movement you would fall about in derisive laughter. So I ought to confess my support for the venerable co-operative alternative, the Woodcraft Folk, which never had those sexist, monarchist and militarist hang-ups.

But the news that the Scout Association had decided to allow girls to join (to the discomfiture of the larger Girl Guides Association) coincided with the death of Lord Maclean, who as Chief Scout made the devastating decision to replace wide-brimmed hats with berets and shorts with long trousers. This led me to think, yet again, about the sociological distinction between structure and function.

As everyone knows, the Founder was Robert Baden-Powell, subject of endless biographies revealing unpalatable truths. The worst was about the siege of Mafeking in the South African War. It was what we now call a media event, stage-managed for his own advancement. There never was a siege. Even the mail got through, including proofs of B-P's book about his own heroic role in it. The soldiers in the relief column were better fed once they had got *inside* the unbesieged town. Meanwhile the "natives" starved. B-P had one of them executed for stealing a goat.

Back home, the self-created hero, with the press king C Arthur Pearson, carefully planned a serial publication, *Scouting for Boys*, using material borrowed from American woodcraft enthusiasts like Ernest Thompson Seton. Some of them sued. But the weekly issues found an eager audience. Leslie Paul related how: "With an astonishing perception they leapt at Scouting as at something for which they had been waiting, divining that this was a movement which took the side of the natural, inquisitive, adventuring boy against the repressive schoolmaster, the moralising parson and the coddling parent. Before the leaders knew what was happening, groups were springing up spontaneously, and everywhere bands of boys, with bare knees and broomsticks, began foraging through the countryside."

The function preceded the structure, and of course the Association was soon founded, under royal patronage, to take control. But by 1909 at least 6,000 girls had become Boy Scouts, and at a rally at the Crystal Palace that year plenty of them turned up in their scout hats and scarves, carrying their staves.

The eagle eye of The Chief discerned that they weren't actually boys, and deputed his poor sister Agnes to hive them off at once into the body that became the Girl Guides. The new organisation was slow to grow, particularly as the girl equivalent of Cubs were to be Rosebuds, only later redesignated as Brownies.

The Scout movement, like later youth organisations in both east and west, has always been subverted by the actual interests of its members, or simply used by them for the facilities it gave access to. When Paul Neuburg was a boy in Budapest and like the city's other schoolchildren joined the Red Flag Club, actually run by the State Security Corps, the ideology washed over him. "In fact it occured to me to remember my socialist club with gratitude only when I emigrated to the west and found that there one had to pay for tickets to the swimming pool and everything else."

When Louis Heren, later foreign editor of the *Times*, was a poor boy in Wapping in the 1930s, he belonged to the 2nd City of London Sea Scouts just because there was no other way of getting near a boat. He recalls his troop as "an extraordinary self-governing, self-motivating and self-perpetuating group". Even when their meeting-place was moved to Captain Scott's *Discovery* moored on the Victoria Embankment in the heart of London, "amazingly, the independence and internal anarchy of the troop remained unimpaired".

Organisational structures always limp afer local realities. The three rejected girls in Northumberland who, after a year of campaigning, are to be allowed to join the 1st Wark and District Scout Group, have many forerunners. It is 14 years since Janice and Marie successfully enrolled in the 31st Battersea Scout Group, and there were heroines behind them, quietly challenging the official reality.

It calls for some kind of salute to those Edwardian girls, shoved off the parade ground by Baden-Powell. So it's sad that the Girl Guide Association, in the words of its Chief Commissioner, is "angry, surprised and disappointed" by the Chief Scout's announcement. Perhaps both organisations have reached the point when they can regain the spirit of those happy early days, when they didn't need chiefs.

People who rejoice that their children enjoy a regular activity on Thursday evenings or weekend shouldn't be totally indifferent or jokey about the way the machinery lumbers into the 1990s. The adult world has similar maladjustments between reality from below and the official structure. Have we coped any better?

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Playing with fire

Guilty secrets: why are we ashamed of our fantasies? A woman speaks out

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Nicaragua: a revolution too far

John Browne: the secret life of a hustler MP

The woman in white; the don't-touch-me-90s

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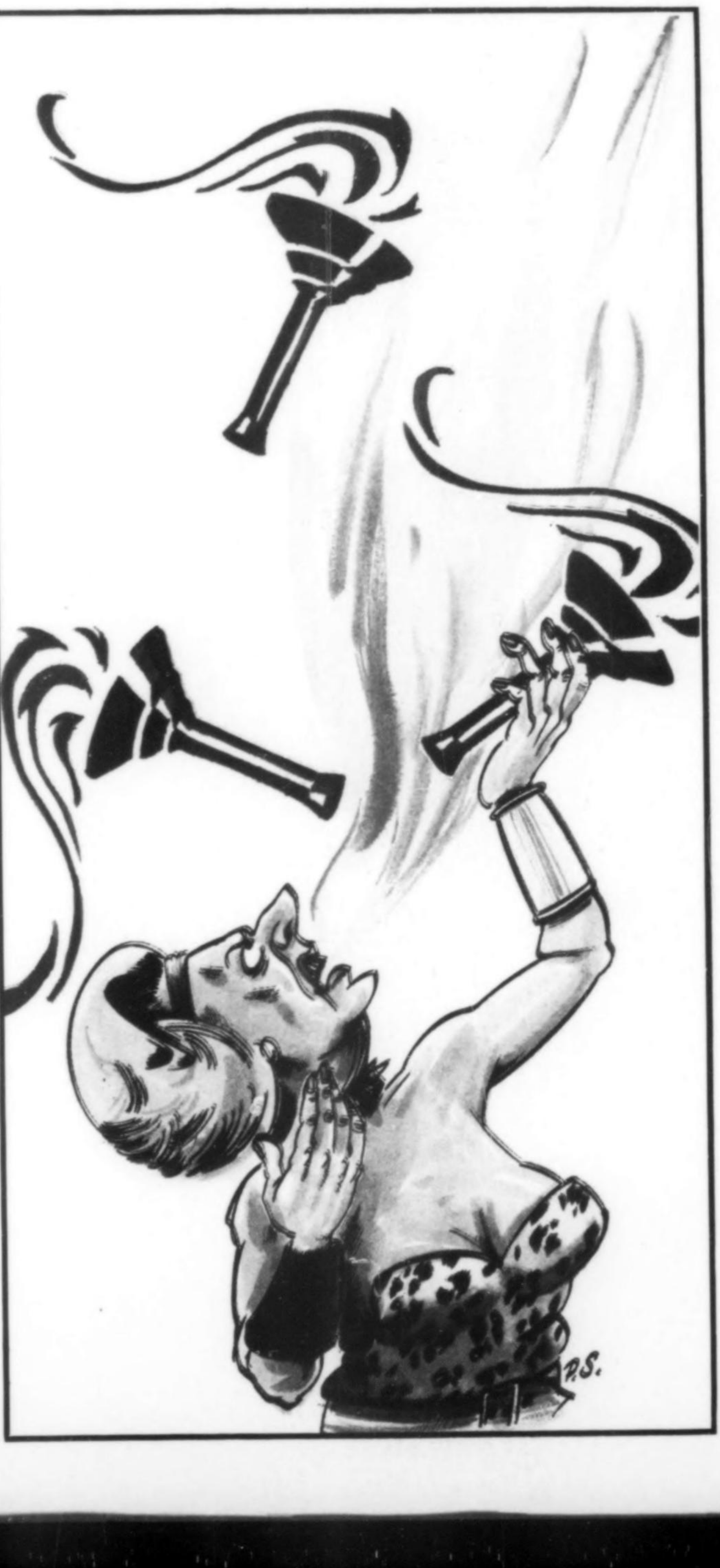

Most people believe Mrs Thatcher is going too far. But she remains remarkably confident. Will she be consumed in her own flames?

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Aided by imaginative private-sector lawyers, in 1985 and 1986, local councillors and council officials put together a series of extraordinary deals: land was bought and sold on "deferred purchase" schemes, parking meters, street lights and bathroom fittings hocked to finance houses in return for cash up front.

Whether—given the heavy consequences for revenue budgets in future years—all this *should* have been done is another matter. But the frustrating thing from the government's point of view was that, when it *was* done, it was *well* done: the deals were lawful. Local government ran rings around the DoE.

Hence the Hammersmith and Fulham case. Although as many as 77 councils—of ranging political complexions—were said to be involved in swaps, the Audit Commission directed its fire at one of the largest. The first court decision was that the council had acted unlawfully—*so* unlawfully that all the contracts were void, and unenforceable and the banks must bear the loss. (And by late 1989 there were, indeed, losses: the majority of the transactions had been on the basis that the council would benefit if interest rates fell, and lose if they rose. Hammersmith was estimated to owe £97m.)

Last week's Court of Appeal decision partly revised the first judgement. Some swaps are legal—but not all. It all depends on the council's *intention*: if all it was trying to do was to minimise risk, then fine, that's lawful. But if it was setting out to play the markets to make money, then it's unlawful.

On the new ruling, it is now estimated that 80 per cent of the Hammersmith deals were unlawful. This still suits the council: the more the activity turns out to have been unlawful, the greater the chance of not having to pay the banks. But last week, the banks estimated that a high proportion of the rest of the outstanding sums—said to total £500 million—could now be recovered by them, leaving the bankers laughing most of the way to the Town Hall.

Hammersmith's liability may turn out to be limited. But other councils which had begun to assume they would not have to pay back losses now find that they must—thus squeezing budgets harder as poll taxes are set. Banks however, may find that some of their provision for heavy losses on 1989 trading are not required after all.

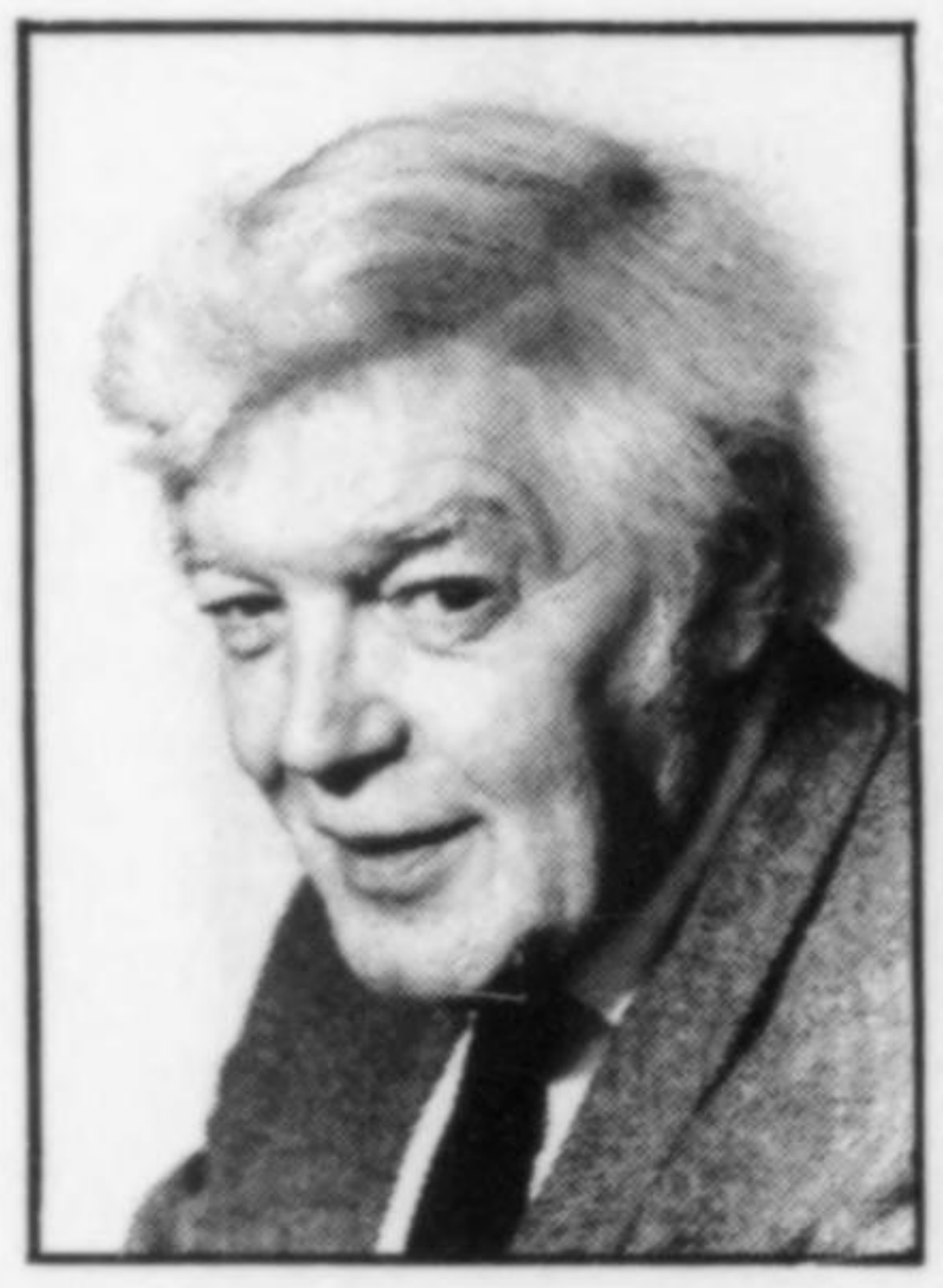
So what's left for council finance officers? It depends on what the council stands to lose and what it wants to achieve. A council that stands exposed to substantial potential losses needs to create a chain of reasoning to show that its *intention* in embarking on the swap deals was partly speculative. In this Alice-in Wonderland world, the deals would be void and the council wouldn't have to pay back the money. If, on the other hand, it wants to keep open the possibility of future use of the interest-rate-swap tactic, then a completely different chain of reasoning is needed: one which starts out from a concern with prudent financial management, eschews the very possibility of speculative gain, and simply seeks to minimise risk.

A council which wanted to back both runners could do no better than hire a renaissance theologian rather than a layer or treasurer.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Blasphemers all

Colin Ward



Building the bypass around our nearest town brought into public view a stone obelisk formerly hidden in a field. Heritage-hunters get out of their cars to find a 19th century monument enclosing a 16th century stone with the puzzling message: R TAYLOR IN DEFENDING THAT WAS GOOD AT THIS PLAS LEFT HIS BLODE.

Decoded, it commemorates Dr Rowland Taylor, rector of Hadleigh, appointed by Thomas Cranmer in 1554. (Cranmer's own history is a stern lesson for those who imagine that if only those charged with blasphemy would be sensible and apologise, their persecutors will relent. He was found guilty of heresy, signed six recantations, but repudiated them when he learned that he was to die anyway, and was burnt to death.)

Rowland Taylor was a bright lad. He married at 16 in the house of John Tyndale (brother of William who was sentenced to be strangled before being burnt for the blasphemy of translating the Bible into English). Taylor, "a man of dominating personality, earthy humour and a shrewd brain", had a doctorate in law and nine children.

As rector, he sold off the church plate and vestments for the relief of the poor. In 1555 he was arrested for using Cranmer's Prayer Book (basis of the one used by the Church of England to this day) and for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation. He was burnt on Aldham Common.

He wasn't the first, or last, Hadleigh citizen to be executed or starved to death in jail simply because of their deviations from currently approved revelations of God. His curate was burnt in Norwich. As were an old weaver John Dale and John Alcock, a sheep-shearer, even though their friends begged for their lives. All in vain of course.

The pitiful history of heresy and blasphemy in Hadleigh can be replicated all over England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. As you go up the City Road in London you pass the old Dissenters' Burying Ground, Bunhill Fields. By the 1950s, decay, neglect and war damage had made it a wilderness of crumbling stone and open tombs. My then boss was the landscape architect Peter Shepheard, and he was commissioned to prepare a scheme for rehabilitating the graveyard, preserving those of the famous, like George Fox, John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe and William Blake, and using the other slabs as paving stones.

But Peter is a conscientious man and he borrowed old books about the lives of *all* the people buried there. It is a catalogue of the persecution and suffering inflicted by the state and the Church of England for not following whatever happened to be the official line in the long struggle for "civil and religious liberty". The words are always coupled together in this way in the histories of non-conformity and in the biographies and epitaphs of its numerous martyrs.

Our national *curriculum vitae* includes an endless history of persecuting people successively seen as blasphemers. Civil and religious liberty was built on their iconoclasm. Now that we have a National Curriculum, ordered by the Education Secretary to be taught in all state schools, it *ought* to include both a recognition of the origins of the freedoms we possess and of the harm done by imposing on other people our own 57 varieties of Christianity.

We all thought that the law of blasphemy was dead though unrepealed. But it was resuscitated, gracefully, by Mrs Mary Whitehouse, in her private prosecution of *Gay News*, its editor and distributors, because of their publication of a poem by James Kirkup. The revelation that we still had such a law led to a demand that it should be *extended* to cover, just out of fairness, religions beyond the Church of England.

This threat obliged Nicolas Walter to instigate a Committee Against Blasphemy Law, simply to avoid new dangers. In an entertaining, highly informative and reasonable book, *Blasphemy, Ancient and Modern* (Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EW, £3.95), he explains that the argument for extending the law without discrimination is "the official position of the Church of England, the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox Jews, the militant Muslims, and some other religious organisations, of several Labour and other progressive politicians", and (according to surveys) of 36 per cent of the population.

It could happen, just for lack of opposition. Nicolas Walter discerns that such a law "would still discriminate between religion and other forms of belief" and that "it would dramatically increase the power of fanatics to impose their views on the majority and to have them protected from criticism".

Here, and everywhere else, history supports his warning. Britain, like the whole world, is littered with the ashes of those who questioned the one true faith, whatever that happens to be.

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Tory wet dream

A Tory reformer takes over. He dumps Parkinson and Baker. Raises taxes. Invests in schools and hospitals. Is a good European. And wins the next election? R W Johnson sees a way out for the Tories

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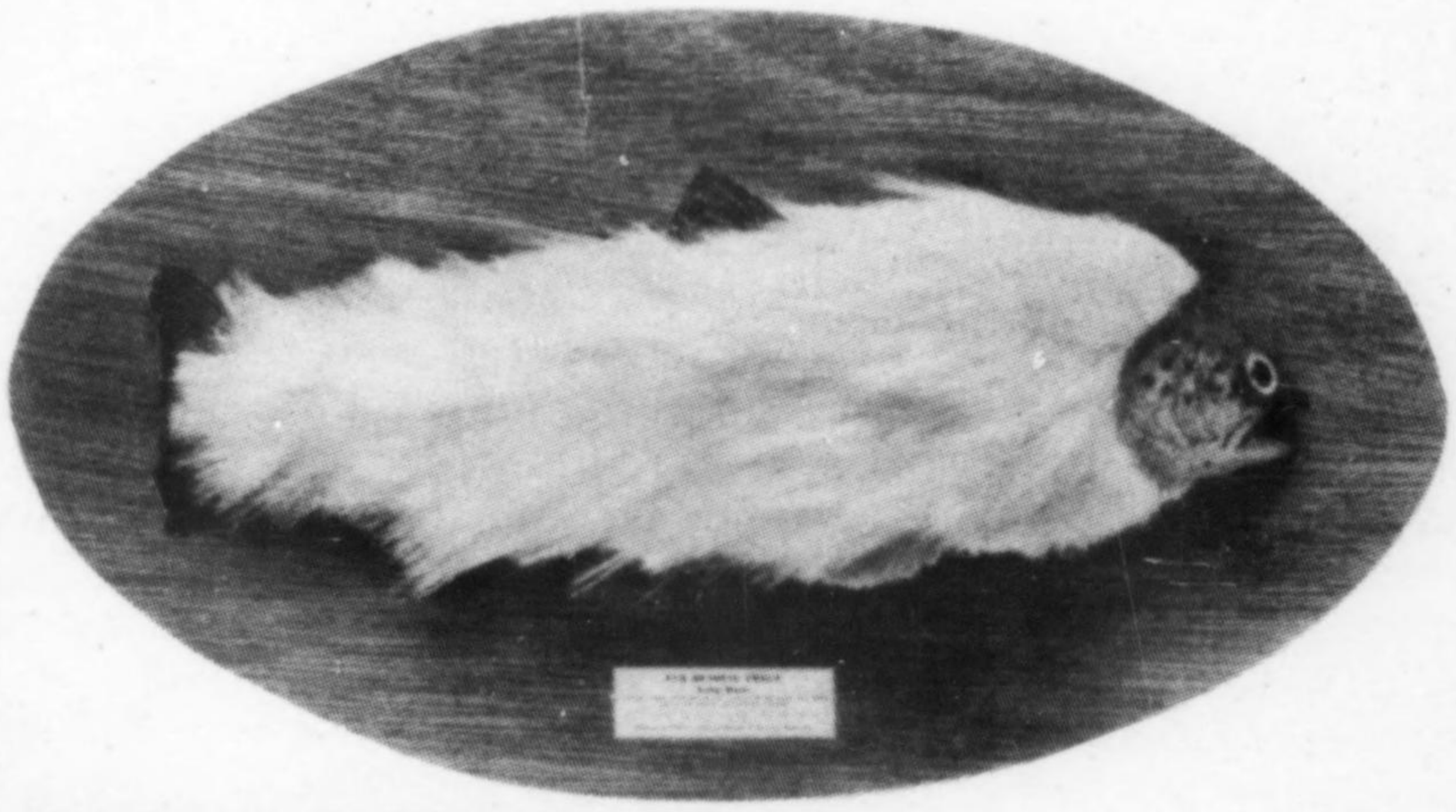

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A few years ago during union negotiations at Haymarket Publishing Group, the director turned down a request for a nursery. "There are only three women with children of an age to need it," he said. "But there are *lots* of male employees with children that age," replied the union. Long silence. "Do you mean to say," asked the director, "that employees' *wives'* children could use it?" It appeared the union did. The nursery was not forthcoming. Male employees have always had wives to stay home and look after the children. Only now that women are required for the workforce are nurseries being discussed.

This is not to deny that the abolition of the tax on workplace nurseries would be a positive move. But there is a broad consensus across campaign groups, voluntary organisations and childcare experts on the need for publicly funded, community-based facilities. The government, however, stubbornly insists that market forces will provide. In this climate Hounslow Borough Council, which has an exemplary record in the field, with 66 per cent of three and four year olds getting pre-primary schooling (the English average is 20 per cent), has joined with Save the Children to try to ensure that the borough gets high-quality, affordable childcare services.

Hounslow cannot afford to expand its own facilities, so its pragmatic response is to offer advice and expertise to private companies willing to provide them instead. The borough is promoting joint ventures while playing a coordinating role between parents, employers and voluntary groups within the community. The Daycare Trust, set up to promote quality childcare in Britain, is also moving along these lines: last December it launched its "Childcare Links" project aimed at providing information and support for local communities wishing to start up similar partnership schemes.

British childcare provision lags well behind the rest of Europe. In Denmark, for example, there is a high level of publicly funded childcare available, with parents paying between 25 and 30 per cent of costs, and central and local government paying the rest. Even in more patriachcal European countries, Peter Moss generally finds a more progressive approach towards children and family policies.

Money is the crucial issue in the current debate on childcare. The private market option is far too expensive for many families—a place in a private nursery in London costs £4,500 or more a year. Working for Childcare and the National Childcare Campaign both agree that individual tax relief against childcare expenses is not the answer, since it disproportionately benefits the middle and higher income earners, and many women in low-paid or part-time jobs derive no benefit at all. Current proposals to replace child benefit, frozen since 1987, with child tax allowances are rejected on similar grounds. The Child Poverty Action Group points out that half of married women in paid employment do not pay income tax, and almost half of mothers with children have no jobs. For these groups, increased child benefit and subsidised community-based childcare is the only real answer.

FRINGE BENEFITS

DESpots

Colin Ward

In the mid-seventies, the late John Vaizey (our foremost authority on the economics of education), in one of his provocative contributions to the education press, asked: "Do we really need the DES?" Exactly what function, he asked, has the department, when the local authorities themselves have inspectors and subject advisers, and when we have a theoretically decentralised education system?

Anyone with the slightest attachment to conspiratorial theories of politics would date from that moment a devious plot by the department to establish absolute control over schools, something it had failed to achieve ever since the Board of Education abandoned the "payment by results" system in the last century.

The present government has been putty in the hands of the department, but we deceive ourselves in blaming the demoralisation of the teaching industry solely on Mrs Thatcher. She received an early reputation in the Heath government as "Maggie Thatcher, Milk Snatcher", but it was the Wilson and Callaghan governments that set current trends in motion. They were manipulated into establishing the Assessment of Performance Unit and into implementing the so-called Yellow Paper of 1976, prepared by the DES to brief James Callaghan for his speech at Ruskin College.

The venue was chosen with a nice sense of irony: Ruskin was founded to provide a liberal education to working men. Although Callaghan said that he wanted to open a national debate on education, the guidelines had already been laid down by the civil servants. A week before his speech, in October 1976, the press had announced that "a multimillion pound emergency programme to monitor standards in primary and secondary schools has been started by the DES". This was at the time when schools were being obliged to make multimillion pound cuts in their own spending, in what has turned out to be the first of endless efforts to demand cost-effectiveness from schools.

At the same time, using exactly the same language as the Tories of the eighties, the then Welsh secretary, John Morris, gave "clear, uncompromising guidance", saying that "the priority must be tilted towards the engineer, the scientist and the mathematician… our children must be taught in the languages of Europe to such a degree of proficiency that they can sell and service our products in the countries of our trading partners…"

You can applaud or denigrate the attempt to blame the long-term decline of British industry on the school system. But you can't avoid the issue of galloping centralisation by shoving all the responsibility on to our current political bosses. All they deserve is our contempt for making sure that their own children are not subjected to the National Curriculum enforced on other people's by the DES.

I was at a meeting last month addressed by Peter Newsam, director of the Insitute of Education in London and former chief education officer of the ILEA. He remarked that five years ago we spent more on examing at sixteen-plus than on all the text books and library books bought to cover the entire secondary school years. By now, he stressed, that gap in priorities had been increased by enlargement at one end and contraction at the other.

That is only part of the story. The DES trump card of assessment means that by 1992 it will be assessing 2½ million children in ten subjects. The head of a science department explained to me some of the complexities this implies. In science, 17 attainment targets are to be tested at ten levels. Can you imagine the labour involved in all this? It is of course the labour of teachers and students, taken out of the time available for teaching and learning.

It represents the final triumph of the DES in taking over the classroom from the teacher. Newsam sees it as the introduction of "planned turmoil". A few years ago GCSE was introduced at breakneck speed. The aims of the National Curriculum if carried through will imply that GCSE is already obsolete. It was characterised by Peter Newsam as the application of formulae to education, the point being that formulae don't require the intervention of human intelligence. And he pointed out that, despite the sanctimonious genuflections of the government towards parent power, "right through the system, power has been removed from people *doing* things".

We are approaching a crisis in schooling provoked by the DES. Anyone with teaching experience knows that we have a battle against a profoundly anti-educational culture, and everyone with learning experience knows that the influence of a particular teacher was far more important than the subject on the timetable. It's such a pity that their self-respect is obliging those teachers to leave the job in droves. Who's going to pull us out of the crisis?

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The supreme sweat

Poll tax: the fallout from the riots

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William Keegan on Major's budget

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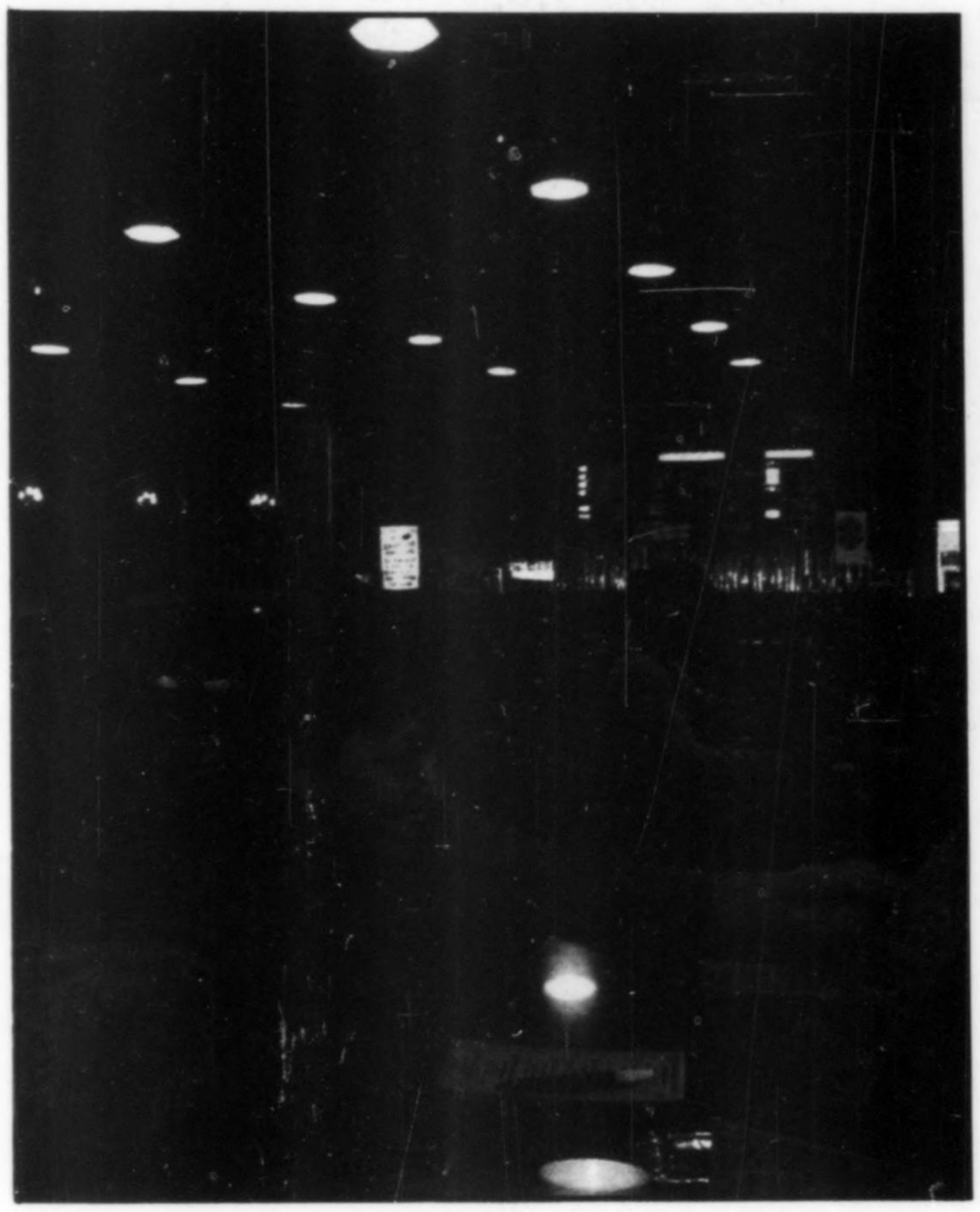

Peach decor, deep pile carpets, chandeliers and the men in dinner jackets. And it's working class women who have the run of this world—3 million of them. Welcome to Bingo, and the supreme sweat

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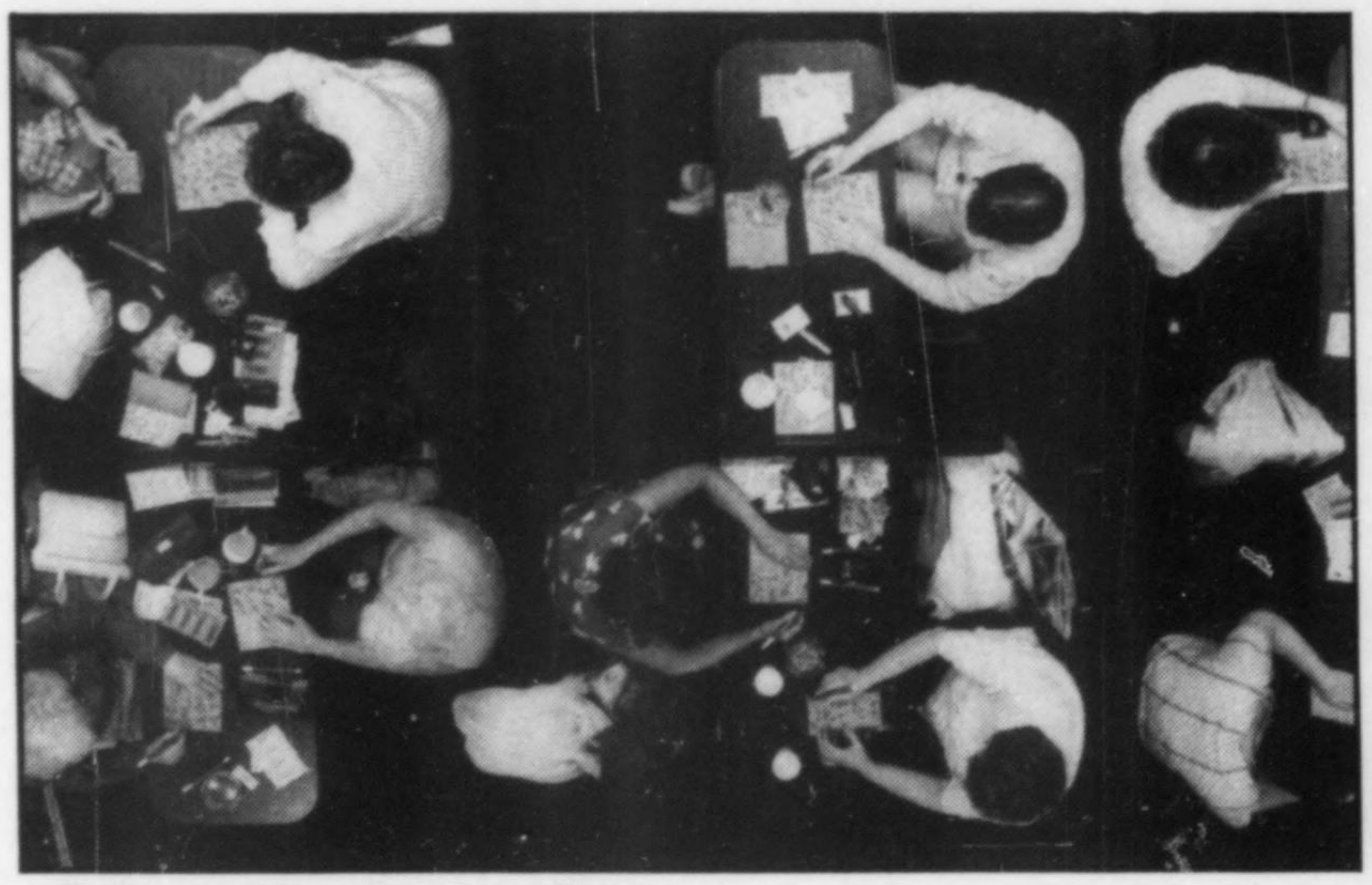

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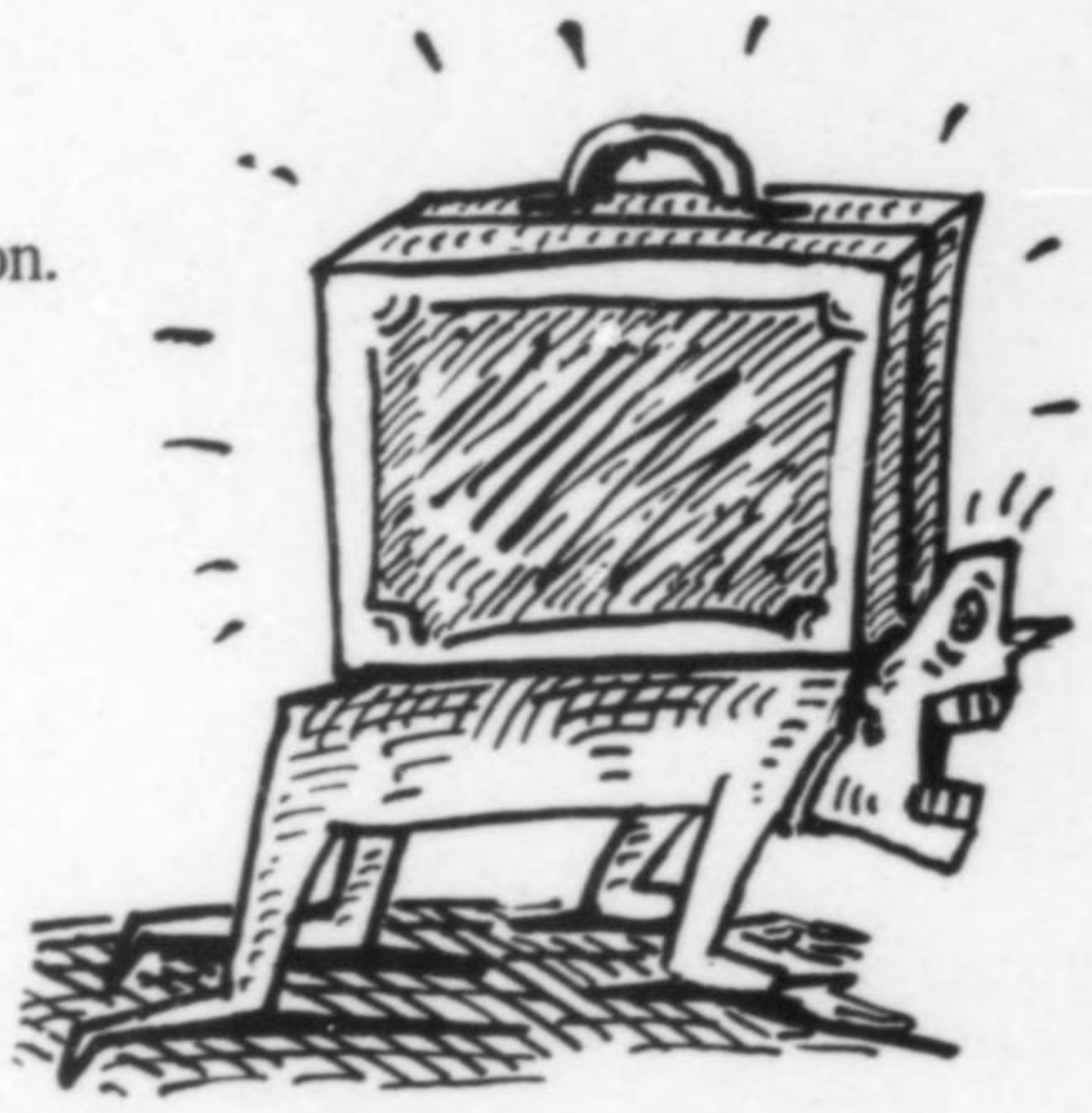

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—to make getting out of the house easier.

The government, recognising that something needed to be done, set up an "internal review" of the support services a few years ago. After long delays a consultation document is finally expected at the end of March.

Most disability organisations expect the review to emphasise a greater role for the voluntary sector. In fact many bodies, like Mencap, already run their own training and employment projects which have been set up *because* existing services are inadequate. Government proposals are likely to be double-edged—formally acknowledging the expertise of voluntary groups, while at the same time minimising extra public expenditure.

Neither will the review tackle the central issue of discrimination. Disabled people in Britain have no recourse to equal opportunities legislation—unlike some other EC countries—and no amount of collaboration with voluntary sector initiatives can make up for the lack of this basic civil right.

Another key issue for disabled people is Britain's poor provision of aids—including wheelchairs and artificial limbs. Disability surveys show that this is why thousands of people can't even get onto the first rung of the employment ladder: if you can't get around, how can you get to work, or attend a training programme?

So bad was the system that the government created a new national body in 1987—the Disablement Services Authority—to do something about it. In its few years' existence, it has started to end a near-monopoly among suppliers, reduce large regional variations in quality of service, and encourage development of new powered wheelchairs (helping up to 24,000 people to live independent lives). Disability groups are near-unanimous in praising the authority's efforts. But unfortunately it will be disbanded this autumn, with services going back to regional health authorities. Kath Savage, a wheelchair user on Trent Health Authority, is convinced that this will result in the service being downgraded as other parts of the NHS compete for the health authorities' increasingly limited resources.

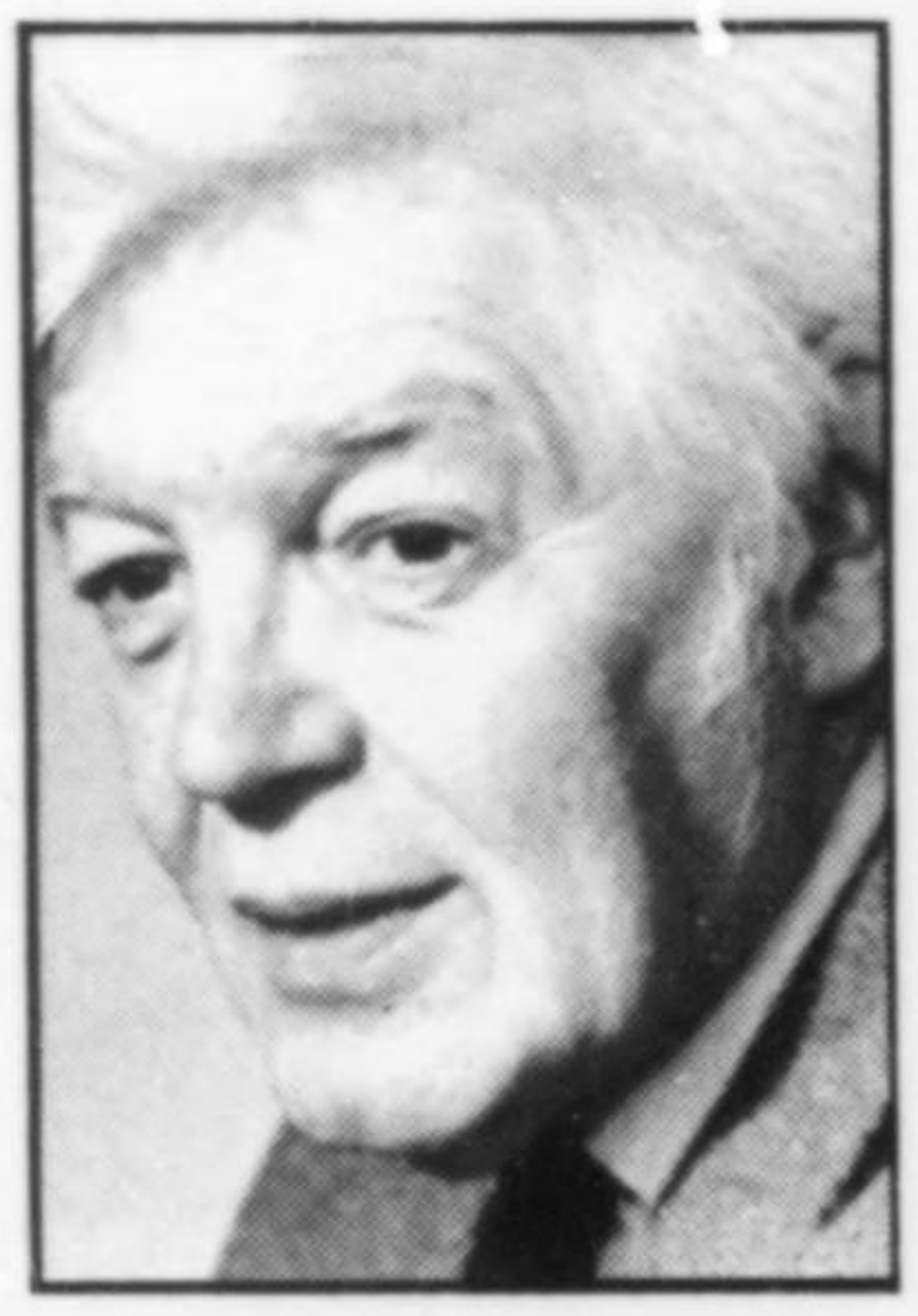
With an underlying unemployment rate of nearly 30 per cent among disabled people, something more radical must be done. First, the financial disincentives of the social security system must be changed to enable more disabled people to work. Second, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation needs to be extended. And if there is to be a quota, and there are those who argue otherwise, it needs to be higher than 3 per cent (6 per cent would more fairly reflect the numbers of disabled people in the population who are of working age) and backed with effective sanctions. Third, the current employment and training services need a complete overhaul. And fourth, provision of aids to help encourage maximum independence must be a priority. With these measures, several hundred thousand people could get jobs.

In the meantime two million disabled people will have to put up with piecemeal tinkering, and continue to be, largely, debarred from mainstream employment.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Into the red

Colin Ward



Entrepreneur is a word with an endlessly changing meaning. It first meant someone who got up musical entertainments. In Victorian economic textbooks it meant the instigator of a commercial undertaking. Now it means someone who uses other people's money to persuade us to spend beyond the prudent limits of our credit.

When you lose your creditworthiness they write you off as a bad debt and move on to the next sucker. If you take your faint greenness seriously, you should rejoice that the downturn in retailing is making dents in all those posh names like Habitat, Sock Shop, Laura Ashley, Debenham, Next, and so on.

Beyond the entrepreneurs of consumerism are the entrepreneurs of property acquisition and development. They are big, powerful and destructive, and local planning authorities are wary of challenging them. They know that the big battalions of professional expertise will be brought in to win the proposal on appeal to the Department of the Environment. Their speculation depends upon sucking in the major retailers, and they in turn rely on us to provide a return on investment.

In one of our local towns there's a planning application from a firm called Citygrove-in-Town for a £15 million shopping development named, characteristically, Malthouse Court. One Sudbury citizen, Brian Allt, has been pushing for a public exhibition (which will happen) of the plan, and for town meetings to discuss the proposals. The council itself falls back on "experts", Donaldsons and Development Planning Partnership, to assure us that the scheme is viable, and who is Mr Allt by comparison?

Well, he's like me. He watches what actually happens. We have two big towns in our patch, Colchester and Ipswich. In the first of these Tesco used to have a site in the High Street. They then sold it off and built a new store in St John's Street, covered with acres of the kind of handmade roof tiles that you and I can't afford. Before the paint had flaked they closed it and moved on elsewhere. Sainsbury's had a new hypermarket at Lexden on the fringe of the town, and once it had killed off the local shops, they moved further out. In neither case has anyone else occupied the empty premises. While the property boom lasted, nobody worried, as the buildings continued clocking up capital gains for the investors in Britain's urban regeneration.

In our other big town, Ipswich, the lessons of the shopping revolution stick out like sore thumbs. One minor disaster is the Carr Street precinct where few shoppers go. The other was truly spectacular: the Greyfriars Centre—a vast complex of shops, a multi-storey car park and some office towers. From the moment it was built it became an emptily sinister clockwork orange.

Ironically, this postwar disaster was reflected in the black glass facade of the building opposite, Norman Foster's Willis Faber Dumas building, visited by architects from all over the world. Eventually that firm took it over, demolished the shops and reclad the office blocks.

But, undeterred by failure, Legal and General have embarked on an even bigger shopping development in the heart of the town, between the Buttermarket and the Old Cattle Market. This is planned to contain two big stores, 40 smaller retail outlets and a 450-space car park. No one has told me how those cars will get there since the council has tried for decades, sensibly, to steer cars out of central Ipswich. Nor has anyone told me how many existing shops in the surrounding streets will die.

The back of this development faces the drab and spartan bus station which can't even provide a covered space for village people shopping in Ipswich. It has already levelled a cheap cafe, a fish-and-chip shop and a low-price, low-rent greengrocers. Unimaginable in the new development.

But current changes in the retail climate have led to the architects writing to the contractors to say that: "Due to our client being unable to authorise the Buttermarket project to proceed, they are instructing us to formally terminate arrangements." The builders have now pulled out their workers and machinery.

The *Guardian* (28 February) tells us that "retailers' costs are rising by far more than inflation just as their sales volumes have stopped growing. Result: misery." But misery for whom?

Why, the property speculators who lured the footloose multiples in on low rents (currently subject to huge increases) in the first place, because every advisor told everyone else that property was a better investment than industry. But now the developers are desperate to maintain confidence: they have invested so much already. So they encourage retailers to get into debt, retailers encourage you to get into debt. It's the entrepreneurial spirit, isn't it?

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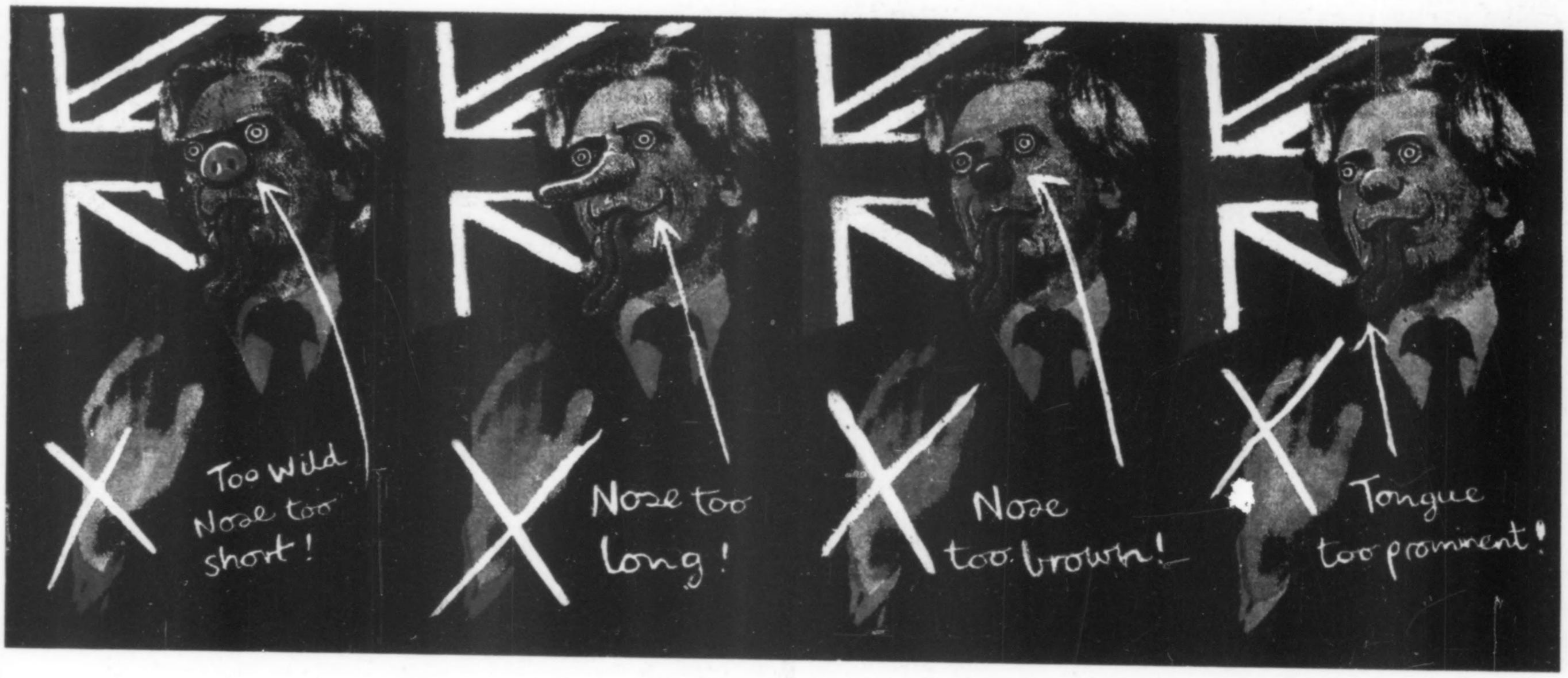
Too Wild
Nose too
short!
Nose too
long!
Nose
too brown!
Tongue
too prominent!

Hair apparent

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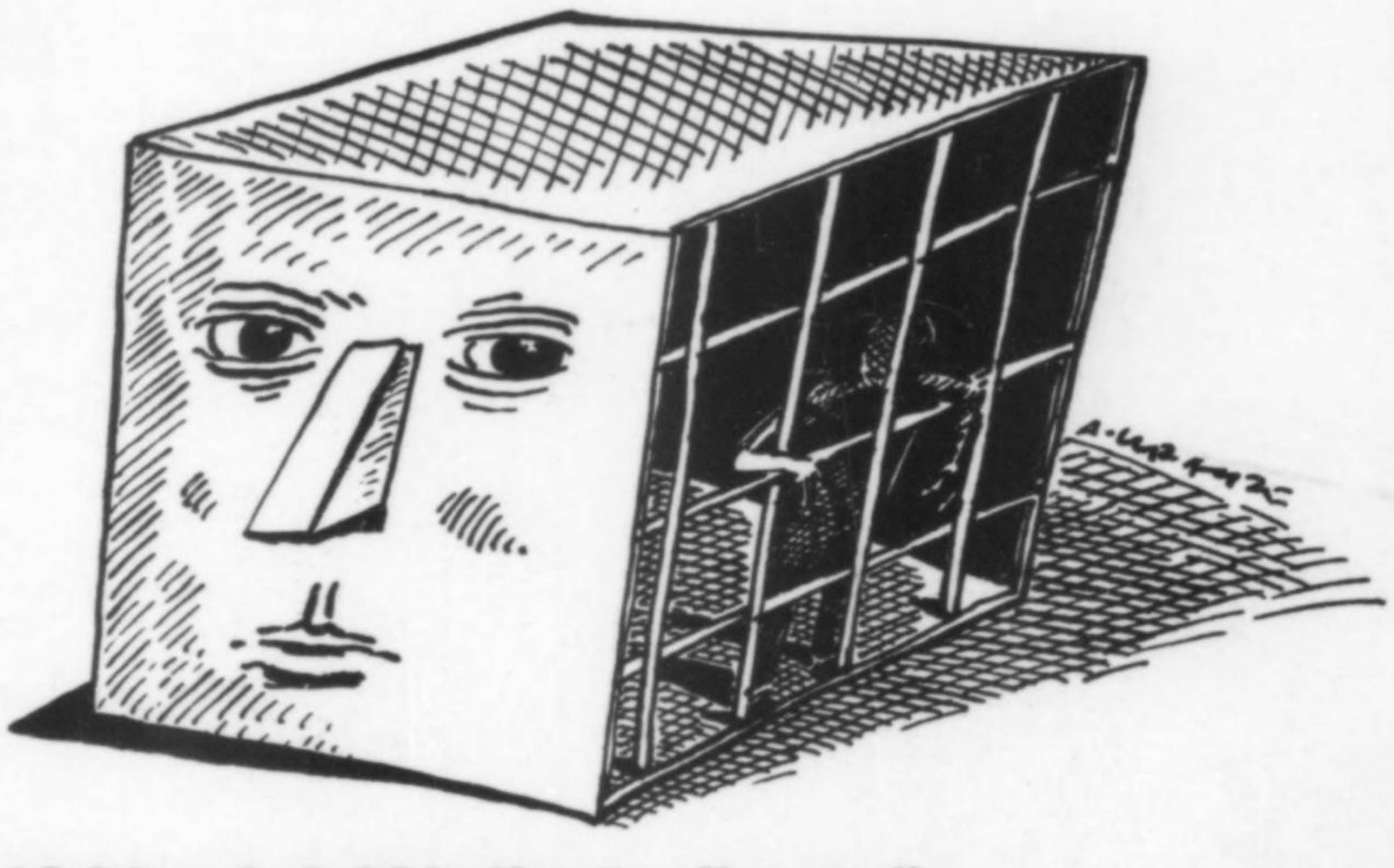

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for people in residential care—a system which *includes* a care element—administered by the DSS. In future, local authorities will meet all costs of private residential care. The individual will be means-tested and in addition required to hand over any benefits which they are receiving to the local authority. The actual *care* of those requiring public assistance will be met by government grant to the local authority based on the care element of the income support system under the old rules.

The only problem is that councils will receive no such help with elderly people they place in their own publicly funded homes. As with private and voluntary homes, local councils can charge where residents can afford to pay but thereafter the authority must make up any shortfall itself. This will continue after 1991.

In the Wirral this resulted in a major campaign against the hung council which has been forced to withdraw most of its proposals. A council report found that the lowest wages were paid in private residential homes, while staff training was minimal and seldom led to formal qualifications. A consultation by social services found that three-quarters of residents and their relatives were against transfer.

Besides venting its ideological antagonism against in-house provision, the government has put forward the new scheme because the old one has the perverse consequence of encouraging local authorities to put people into residential homes, where they are supported by the DSS, rather than spend their own scarce resources on home helps, meals on wheels and other forms of domicilary care. The number of people claiming income support in residential care and nursing homes rose from 12,000 in December 1979 (at a cost of £18 million) to 147,000 by December 1988. The estimated costs of such care is now over £1 billion a year. The government hopes that when local councils are in charge of community care budgets, they will seek as cost-effective a deal as possible. Given the massive expected demand for care, plus the growing numbers of elderly people, keeping people in their own homes will be cheaper than putting them in residential care.

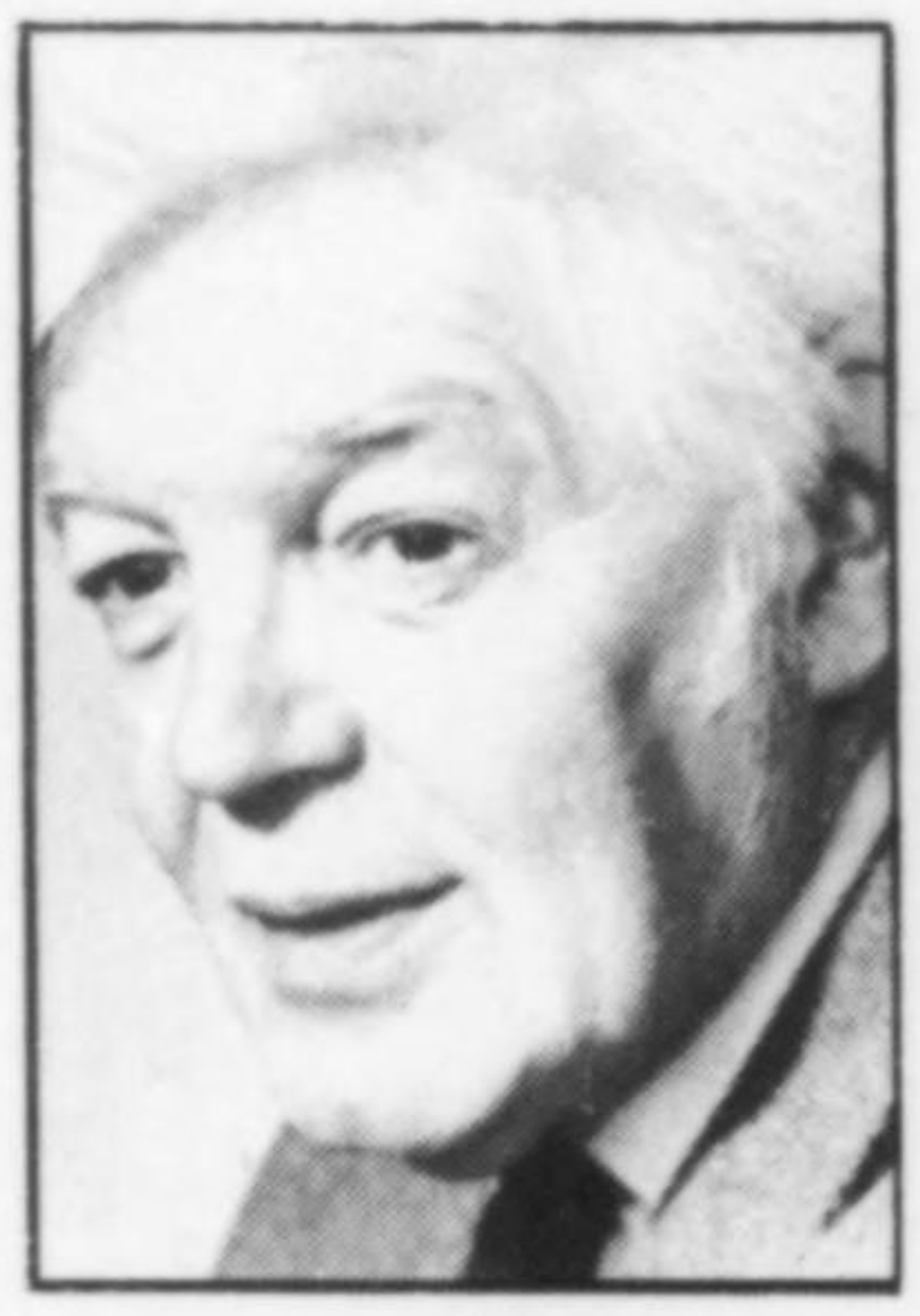
Evidence presented to the Select Committee indicates that these huge sums are failing the people they are meant to serve. In many areas the shortfall between benefits and charges is about £30 a week. Age Concern say that 42 per cent of claimants in residential homes need to find additional help, much of it from charities. The BEN Motor and Allied Trades Benevolent Fund says it had a shortfall in income of £633,000 in 1989, while a survey by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in 1988 found that 59 per cent of the 206 homes surveyed had a funding deficit totalling over £1.4 million. A survey by Counsel and Care for the Elderly showed that only seven out of 132 private and voluntary nursing homes and one third of residential homes in the London area had fees as low as income support levels.

The Tory revolt in the Commons was in support of just these people. There are eight million elderly voters in Britain. In the past they have been a bedrock of support for the Tories. Grey power is on the move.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Too many chiefs

Colin Ward



Going to County Hall last week I realised that it must be just like this in East Germany: people drifting off every Friday and not coming back. As I walked through just a few of the 11 miles of corridor I saw hand-written notices on doors with messages like "Alan Palmer has left. All post and enquiries re Strategic Policy to Room 219."

I spent half a lifetime getting used to that building. I was endlessly there in the fifties, trying to cope with the planners and the administrators of the London Building Acts and Byelaws. In those days we called the place The Morgue or The Kremlin. This wasn't a political jibe. It just referred to the vast hierarchical bureaucracy exercising every last inch of power at all levels. Sometimes I would find myself on the Members' floor with its oak panelling, and come across worthy people on the housing committee struggling with the procedural machine. In the late sixties, as a technical college teacher, I was actually on the payroll.

Like every other ex-Londoner I grew up with equivocal feelings about the London County Council, later transformed into the Greater London Council. I could draw a graph to show how, just in the field of architecture, the history of the LCC/GLC consisted of bright moments of innovation followed by formalistic troughs, from the 1980s on. The same was true in planning. I was there in the TV studio when the one-time chief strategic planner, Dr David Eversley, resigned. "What have you achieved?" the interviewer asked him. "Nothing", he replied. "And what have you learned?". He answered: "Humility."

As to housing, Tony Judge, a life-long socialist, summed up his experience as chair of the GLC Housing Management Committee with the words: "The impression, often confirmed as accurate on deeper examination, is of a vast bureaucracy concerned more with self-perpetuation than with either efficiency or humanity."

Rather than blame anyone it is more sensible to recognise that in our kind of centralised state, a national government cannot tolerate the existence of a city government, with a population bigger than that of many nation states, just across the river from Westminster.

A century ago, no sooner had the central government tidied up London by setting up the LCC than it took fright and established the metropolitan boroughs as countervailing powers, thus ensuring continual rivalry between them. In the 1960s, a Conservative government, hoping to break up the LCC, transformed it into the GLC with the Inner London Education Authority taking over education in the old LCC area. At the same time it forced amalgamations among the old boroughs.

The new bodies in County Hall fulfilled Parkinson's Law to the letter. As the GLC's responsibilities declined so its establishment increased. As the schools and the school population of inner London fell, so the ILEA staff multiplied. Given the protagonists and given the life-and-death powers of central government over local authorities which we take for granted but which is unthinkable in many parts of the world, we were moving into some kind of *Götterdammerung*. Even I, as an irresponsible outsider, published an article in February 1974 which ended with the question "Can the GLC survive to 1984?"

If the future was obvious to me it should have been clear to the clever folk running London. The reason why I took a trip down Memory Lane to County Hall last week was for a meeting set up by Bob Caterall of the Centre for Urban Educational Studies under the title *London 2000: Education Strategies for the Whole Community*. He says that "the abolition of the ILEA is a symbolic defeat for the cross-London struggle for quality and equality in education", but he sees the transfer of education to the boroughs as "an opportunity for radical improvement in accessibility and delivery".

Apart from the question of who is going to finance non-school education, he wants a federation of interest groups for an Inner London Education *Alliance*. I would like the boroughs to federate under such a title just to make facilities available to all. Some of the impressive new chief education officers were there to assure me that the crossing of borough boundaries by children and students was not an issue. They already had reciprocal agreements. Committee members already have ILEAC, a joint committee of politicans, and out of self-interest the CEOs will join forces.

Boundaries aren't the issue. Nor is the future of the bureaucracy. The key question is to make it worthwhile for teachers, some of whom are not sure who is going to give them a paycheck at the end of April, to be in inner London classrooms. The tragedy of that vast neo-Baroque pile on the South Bank is that it was always full of Chiefs confident that the Indians would be around forever, down at the chalk face.

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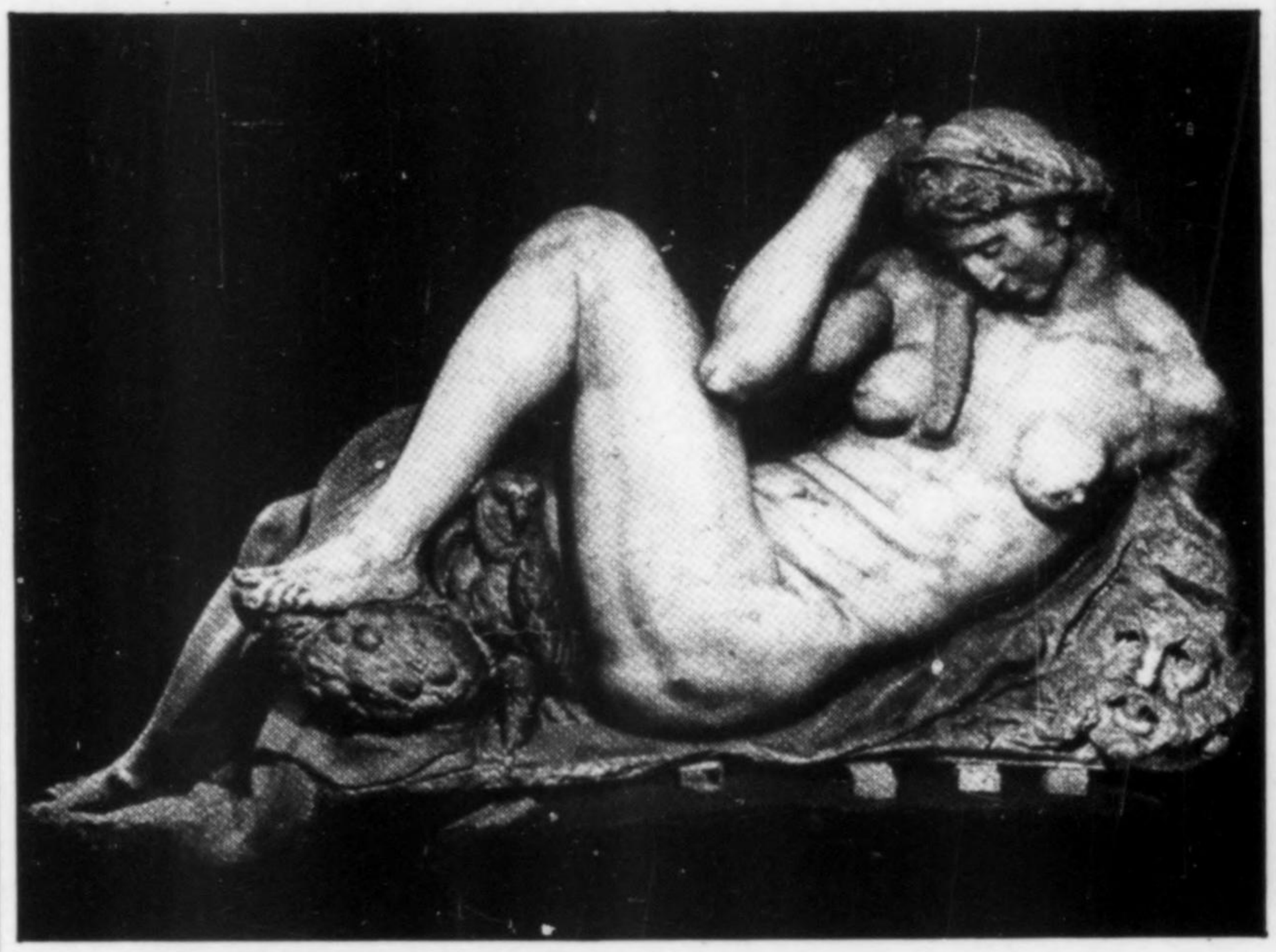

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after the second world war.

Mrs Purdy said she was willing to pay tax but only if the authorities wrote directly to her. They went on writing to Mr Purdy and we do not know what was his fate. It was not until the late 1970s that the Board of Inland Revenue agreed to correspond directly with women about their tax affairs and the phrase "if you are a married woman, living with your husband, will you please ask him to complete the form as if it were addressed to him", disappeared.

However, although the principle of aggregation has been abandoned, the view that a wife damages a man's taxable capacity is still alive and kicking because we still have the married man's allowance (MMA), now to be called the married *couple*'s allowance. This in fact will be allocated to the husband unless he has insufficient income to make full use of it *and* he agrees to transfer it to his wife. The MMA was introduced in 1918, nine years after Lloyd George had introduced tax allowances for children for "men whose earnings just bring them within the clutches of the income tax collector... when they have a family dependent upon them, the obligation to keep up apearances of respectability of all their dependants is very trying."

Introducing his Finance Bill in 1918, the chancellor of the exchequer told the House of Commons: "I propose to make the children's allowance apply to a wife also and to extend a similar allowance to all dependants who are incapacitated." One member suggested that a wife was worth two children, but the House seemed satisfied with equating a wife with a child or a disabled person, and £25 (the value of the child allowance) was added to the personal allowance of any married income tax payer whose earned income together with his wife's earnings was less than £800 a year. By 1920, when the single person's allowance was £135 and the MMA was £225, a married woman in paid employment was allowed a maximum of £45 earned income relief to offset against her earnings, for it was recognised that expenses were incurred in having paid employment.

In order to encourage married women to take up paid employment during the second world war, the amount of earned income relief was increased to become equivalent to the single person's tax allowance and has remained at that level ever since. Thus on marriage, a woman went on paying either the same amount of tax on her earnings, or, if her husband was paying at a higher rate of tax, *more* because her earnings aggregated with his attracted the higher rate too. It was the *man*'s tax position which improved on marriage because of the MMA.

Today the MCA is even harder to defend. Under independent taxation, marriage will make no difference to the tax position of a woman, but it will still improve that of her husband. We are often told that the Duchess of Westminster does not need child benefit and that child benefit should be "targeted" on poorer families who really need them. Could someone explain why all husbands, including the Duke of Westminster, should get the MCA, and why the resources released by abolishing it would not be better spent targeted on families with children or with a carer?

FRINGE BENEFITS

The Sunday Pulp

Colin Ward

As a writer and propagandist, my method of reading the papers is to pile them up on a chair in the kitchen until the heap gets knocked down whenever the cat leaps onto it. I then, with a watching brief for other family members, cut out the interesting bits.

The acid test is my pair of scissors. This is why we gave up buying a Sunday paper ten years ago. There was too little to cut out. I wouldn't recommend any newspaper. They all fall short of my ideal. We buy the *Guardian* and the local regional daily, but long experience told me that for some kinds of information it was useful to go out and get a copy of the *Times*. This is no longer true. It *is* true that for the most detailed summary of some official report it is sensible to get a *Daily Telegraph*.

But the Sunday saga is a tale of Gresham's Law. Once upon a time the two big rivals each contained something unique. When they began their magazine supplements in the 1960s, they contained photo-journalism so good that we took the trouble to find the channels by which piles of back numbers could be got free, so teachers could fillet them to use in class. Those days are long past. The few nuggets are buried in a spoilheap of dross, so the whole enterprise is like a worked-out goldmine. Or a dead forest.

In America last year I watched a young boy on a traffic island selling the monster Sunday edition of the *New York Times* to passing motorists. By the next intersection a hundred yards further on, they had sifted out the half dozen sections they didn't want and had thrown them at the overflowing rubbish bin. If I had followed them I would, no doubt, have seen further disposals.

"How like the throwaway culture!" we say in our superior way, without noticing that we are travelling along the same road. Down the lane from us, my friend Richards does the Sunday paper round, delivering down the bumpy byways and gravel driveways. He has the usual horror stories of the way the rich are the most reluctant payers and of the appallingly fierce dogs that make the Englishman's home his castle.

But last Sunday he weighed the papers, relating their bulk to their circulation. Like me he is so old that he thinks in imperial rather than metric measures, but the result is the same in both tons and tonnes.

His first group consisted of the *News of the World*, the *Sunday Mirror* and the *People*, weighing together 1½lbs, which multiplied by a 3 million circulation gives 4½ million pounds. His second group was the *Observer*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Express* and the *Mail on Sunday*, together weighing 4lb 13oz, which multiplied by 700,000 purchasers weigh 3,370,000 pounds. Then came the newcomers, the *Sunday Correspondent* and the *Independent on Sunday*, adding up to 2½lbs. A multiplier of 300,000 circulation gives a weight of 750,000 pounds. Finally, in a class of its own, as they say, comes the *Sunday Times*, weighing 2lb 3oz. A circulation of over a million makes it up to 2½ million pounds.

Richards is looking for flaws in his arithmetic, but whichever way he examines his sums they come to around 11 million pounds. In other words 4,900 tons or tonnes of paper are used every week to bring you the Sunday paper of your choice. Unsold copies must add another 10 per cent.

I'm hoping that Friends of the Earth will tell us how many acres or hectares of Scandinavian or Canadian forests this automatic consumption represents. I'm yearning to be reassured that X per cent of it consists of recycled paper.

But where I live, first the Scouts and then the Hadleigh Youth Club tried waste paper collection. The latter organisation installed a huge container in George Street, Hadleigh. The populace thankfully filled it with paper but the club found that fluctuation in the international market made their contribution hardly worth collecting. Meanwhile, Britain actually imports *American* waste paper.

Market forces are an appalling guide to right conduct. They ensure that you and I are faced with 4,900 tonnes of paper every Sunday just to make sure the advertisements we don't read end up on our breakfast table. To fill the spaces in between they all have the same variations on holidays, the same features on properties in the hinterland of Toulouse or Berkshire, the virtues of houseplants or garlic or Philip Larkin's sex-life. Most cynical of all are their guides to being a green consumer.

It wasn't until this year that I ever got asked to join this Sunday space-filling. They tell me it's well-paid and you never know who might be out there, waiting for the message. I'll try hard like I always do, but I can't help thinking that the best thing you or I could do for the Sunday press is the simple act of not buying it.

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When the kissing had to stop

'It was fun—then it turned ferocious. The police took a bloody hiding. We pelted them with stones. We felt so powerful'

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Watching tv ads; women who leave their children; terror in Strangeways Prison

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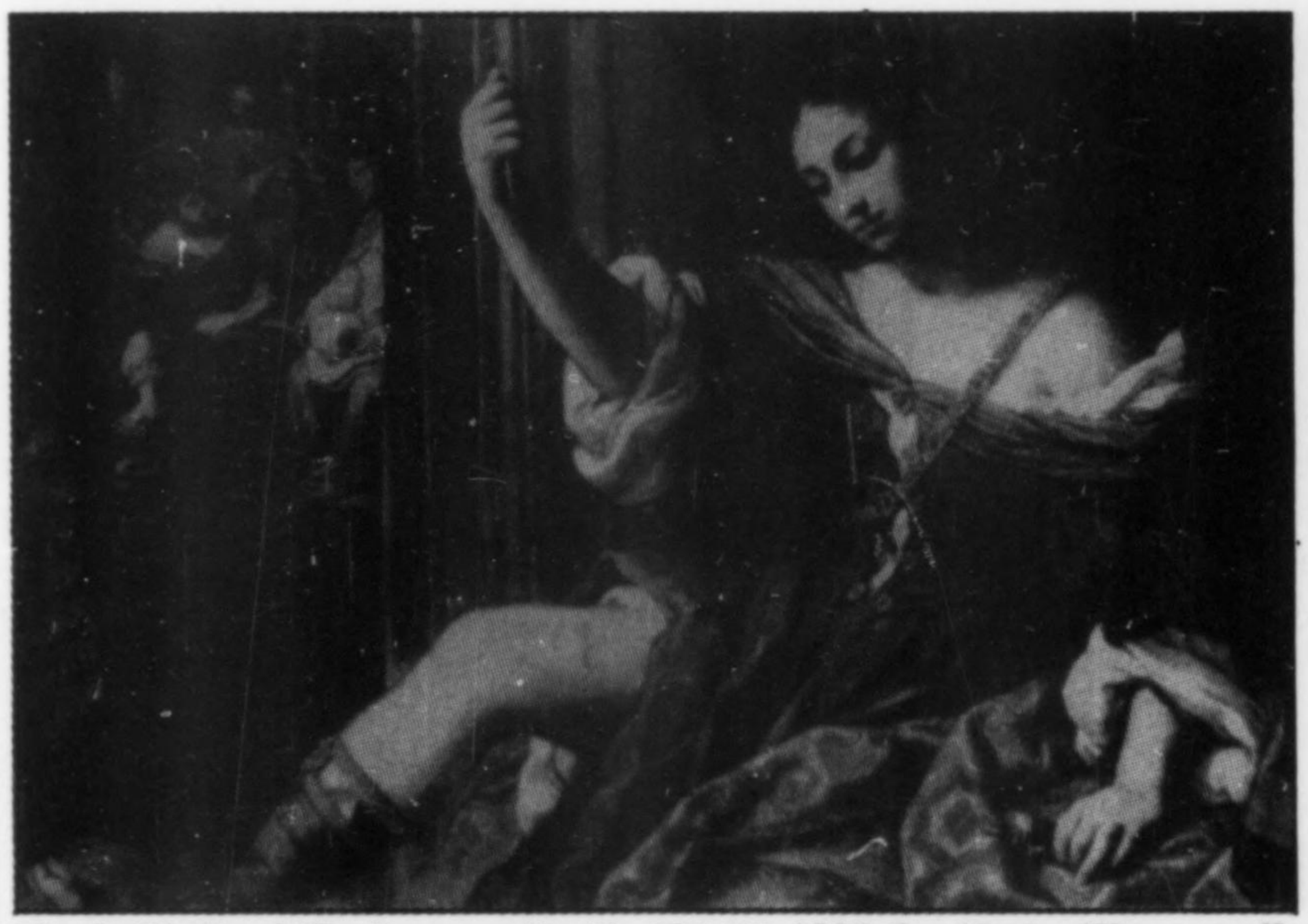

Elisabetta Sirani "Portia wounding Her Thigh", 1664. See Marina Warner on the "dialogue between women and prevailing definitions of their nature", page 34

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If you really can know a nation through its advertising, then Britons are self-hating, sexist and above all, anxious, argues Paul Morley

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of how we build career bridges", Mr Clutterbuck discarded his notes. A delegate asked: "Could you tell us from a male perspective, how we might influence the influencers like you?" The answer appeared to be a resounding "no", for we were then lectured on "mentoring" and on how it is up to the individual to seize the opportunities which are there.

Ealing's director of personnel, Sylvia Pierce, pointed out that the speaker was totally failing to address the notion of male power, and drew attention to the vast numbers of women who are not aiming to be senior managers but trying to get out of dead end jobs. "How do you develop yourself if you're a part-time cleaner," she asked. "By mentoring?" It appeared from the reply that the onus must be on women to progress.

Day two dawned; would this be the conference to break all public speakers? No. Joanna Foster, chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission, had done her homework and related what she had to say to the reason we had all gathered: to look at ways of ensuring better quality, better quantity and better access to training for women.

Not the first to draw attention to the white, male, middle-aged look of the new Training Enterprise Councils, Foster is clearly getting down to the brass tacks of raising their awareness. The problem is that even employers who invite the head of the EOC to speak to them and are positively seeking to entice women back to work haven't begun to think through the implications and investment needed. "They think a bit of flexible working is all they have to provide," says Foster. "They're not yet looking seriously at training and promotion." At a recent meeting with leading employers "in a sector that's crying out for women", one man was overcome with surprise. "Do you mean we're going to have to start thinking about things like *childcare*?" He is now chair of a TEC.

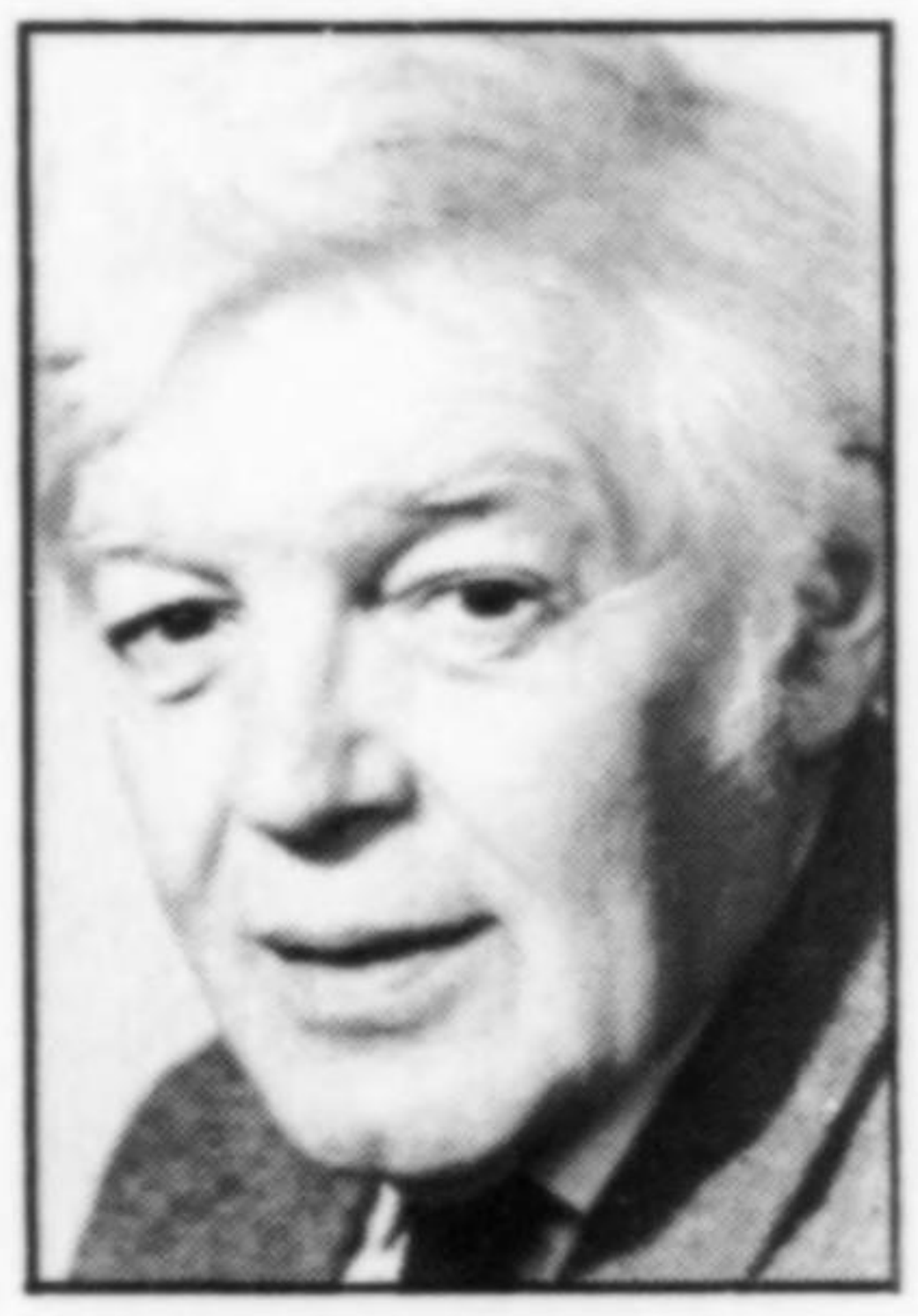
Of the 49 TECs formed so far, just one has a female chair; 42 of the 458 board members and six of the 49 chief executives are women. Yet women will represent more than half the workforce in 1995. While the Training Agency holds the reins in the changeover period, equal opportunities policies have to be built into TEC corporate and business plans. However, the gap between policy statement and implementation is massive—just one area where WAT's collective expertise could prove useful.

Wittingly or not, Clutterbuck has put women's training and development back firmly on the agenda. WAT's national office, already working closely with the EOC, is even more determined to take a proactive role in helping TECs to become aware of the many tried and tested training initiatives practised by its member organisations and trainers. Regional groups are busy assessing how they may be able to help TECs to identify and meet skills shortages through building on positive achievements in the realm of women's training at all levels, and through strategies designed to offer employees real choice in terms of childcare and care of the elderly. The offer is there, let's hope the "captains of industry-led" TECs will be receptive.

FRINGE BENEFITS

The build-up boys

Colin Ward



I missed out on Sunday School hymns, but I learned one long ago from a fellow soldier who would sing it endlessly while working on the causeways which now link the islands around Scapa Flow. It went: "We are building day by day/ In our work and in our play,/Not with hammer, blow by blow/Not with chisel, sawing so/'Little builders all are we/Building for eternity."

It surfaces in my mind every few years for good reason. I lately read the diploma dissertation of an architect, Geoffrey Haslam, who had an intuition that exceptionally creative adults had a childhood history of building dens, hide-outs and camps from whatever materials came to hand. So he collected a sample of people he considered to be outstandingly creative. When he probed their past with a tape-recorder, they all responded with vivid accounts of their den-building activities between the ages of seven and 14.

Haslam comments that "considering that they can achieve so much at such an age with no assistance or guidance it seems odd that so few adults ever set about building even the simplest structure. Some time during their development they lose ability, confidence and motivation to build."

Then I read one of the half-dozen biographies of the overwhelmingly creative American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. They all stress that his mother was a Froebel-trained teacher. All modern theories about play and its place in education can be traced back to Friedrich Froebel who started the first kindergarten in 1840. He developed a series of gifts, occupations, games and songs which he thought appropriate to different stages of a child's growth. The "gifts" began with a woollen ball, to be given to a child at three months. Next was a wooden sphere, a cube and a cylinder, followed by a series of subdivisions of the cube. Further gifts—you could call them birthday presents—followed: wooden rings, sticks and building blocks. Some of Wright's biographers trace these gifts' direct influence on his early houses at Oak Park, Illinois.

So we can't dismiss the experience of being a little builder just because it won't be recognised in the National Curriculum. Nor can we fail to relate the differing scores of boys and girls in tests of spatial ability to the gifts we choose to give them.

This is why, with that Sunday School reminder in my head, I went off to Gloucester. It wasn't to see Robert Opie's Museum of Advertising and Packaging at the docks there, but to catch the current show of *Building Toys* (at the Gloucester Folk Museum in Westgate Street until 21 April).

Significantly, it has been put together, not by an old buffer reliving his childhood, but by a maths teacher from Bristol, Malcolm Hanson, who organised a Meccano exhibition a couple of years ago. Children have been building with offcuts from the joinery shop or with houses of cards for a very long time, and more than a century ago "Dr Richter's Art Department" in Leipzig was making bricks of resin-bonded stone dust, later known here as Lott's Bricks.

But all such products depended on nothing but gravity to hold them together. So some manufacturers produced cement. This however had the disadvantage that the chosen model became permanent: the object was lost. Others then supplied a water-soluble bond: dip your tower in the sink and it becomes available for everything else.

The most far-sighted devised ways of making the systems interlocking, in a dozen different ways that press, clip or bolt together. Endless products are on show: Minibrix, Bayko, Dinky Builders, Arkirecto, Wenebrix, Samlo, Arkitex, Matador, Mobaco and Pennybrix. Every available material was used in the effort to catch the market.

They were the toy equivalent of the motor industry. If only the market was big enough, they could conquer it. In the end it was won by a pacific Danish father-and-son firm, Lego, carefully exploiting all the efforts of their predecessors to hold the whole thing together.

It's an unintentional parable of course, of society itself. The one-off models of Tower Bridge or Buckingham Palace were doomed, as they left nothing for us to do tomorrow. If you elected for one particular aspiring system, all you could hope for on birthdays was an additional set to add to your chance to do the same thing. In both closed and open systems, the kind that will win is adaptable to any kind of creativity.

We are in a bout of the Individualism kit, adopted just because the Collectivism pack seemed so expensive. What we kids need is a creative and interchangeable range of parts that lets us build what we like. So long as it's interlocking and compatible, none of us can fail.

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Heart of darkness

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Greenery: Sue Townsend, Alex Cockburn, Books; children's sexuality; immigration; Mandela music

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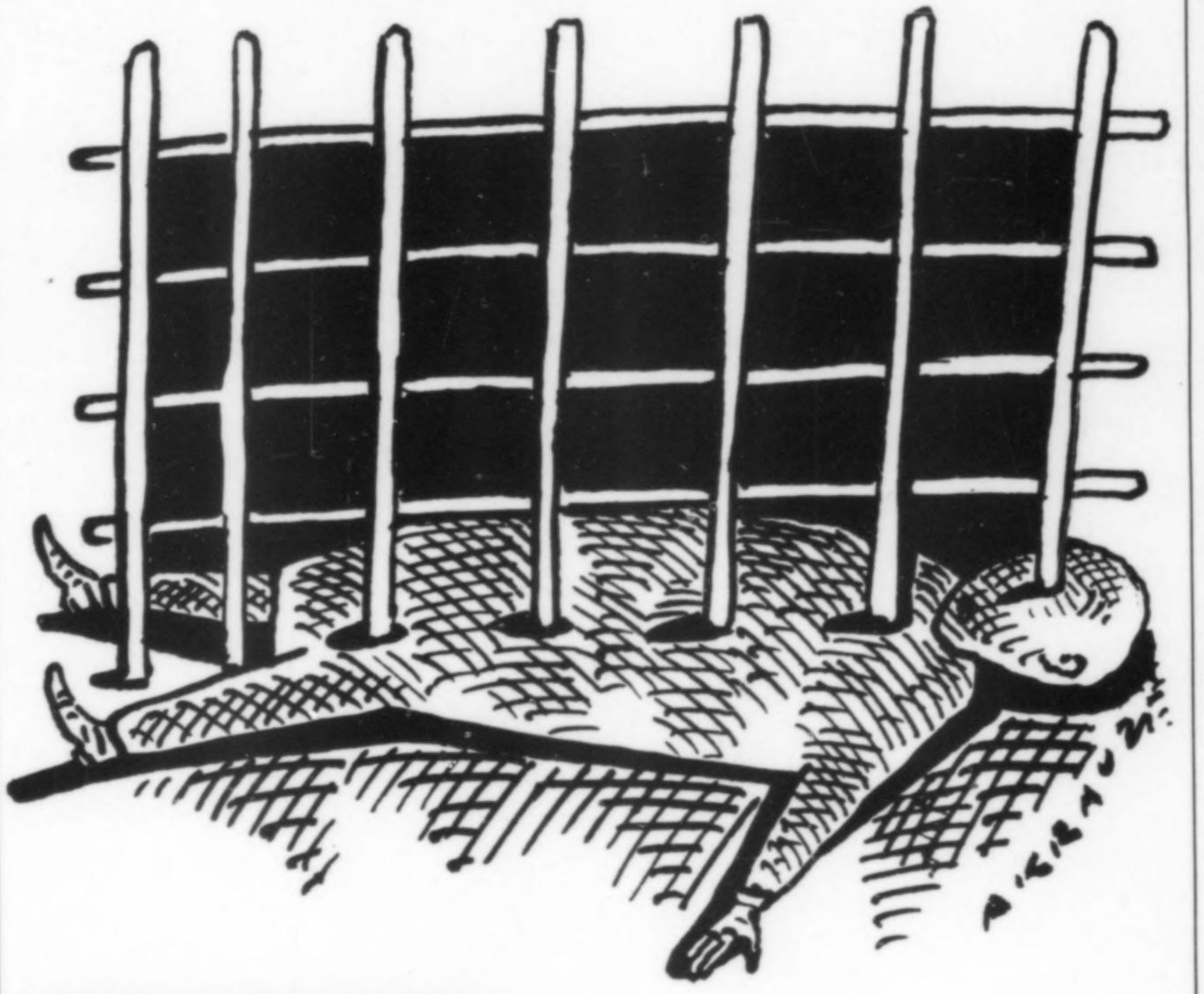

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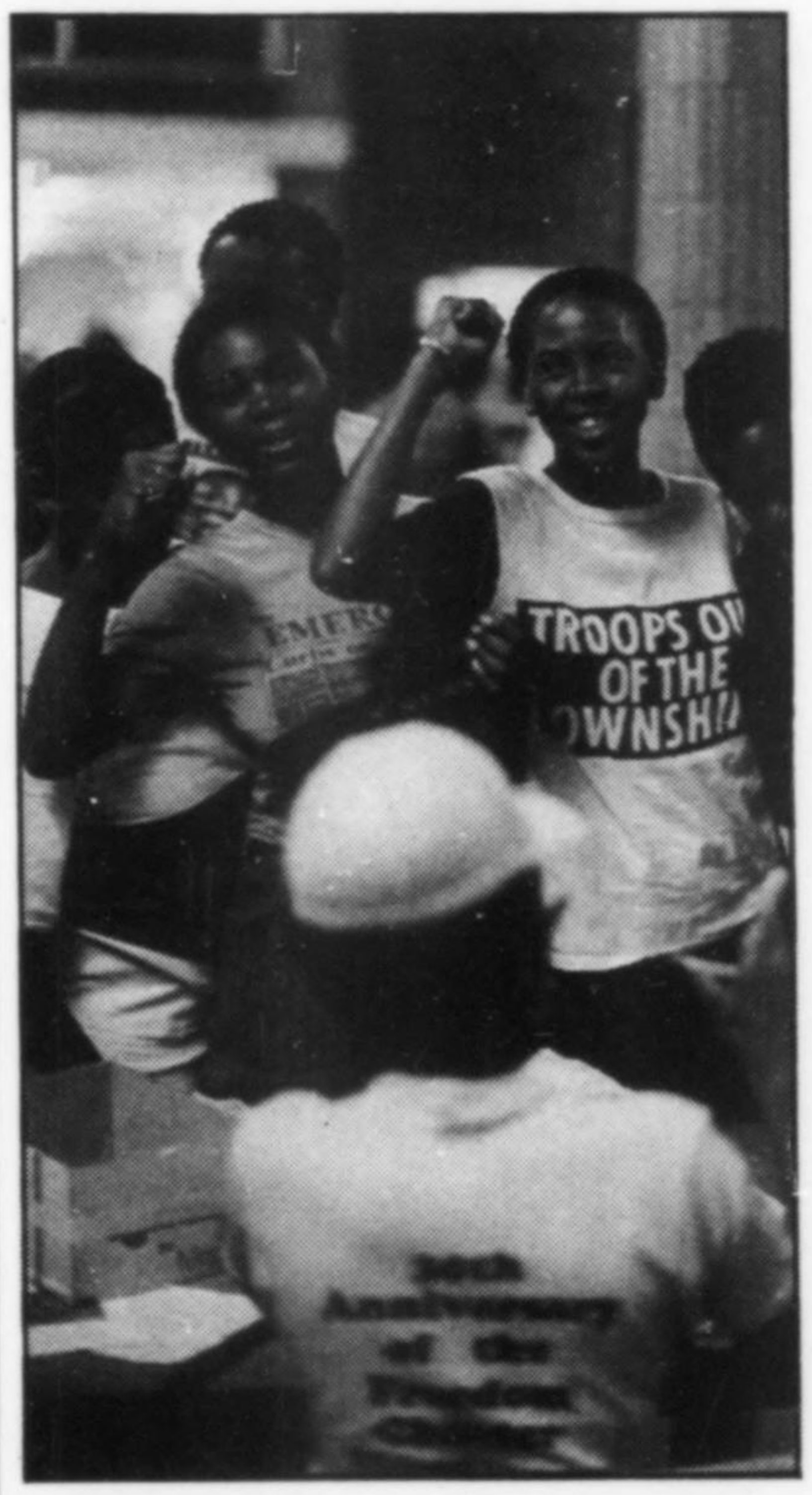

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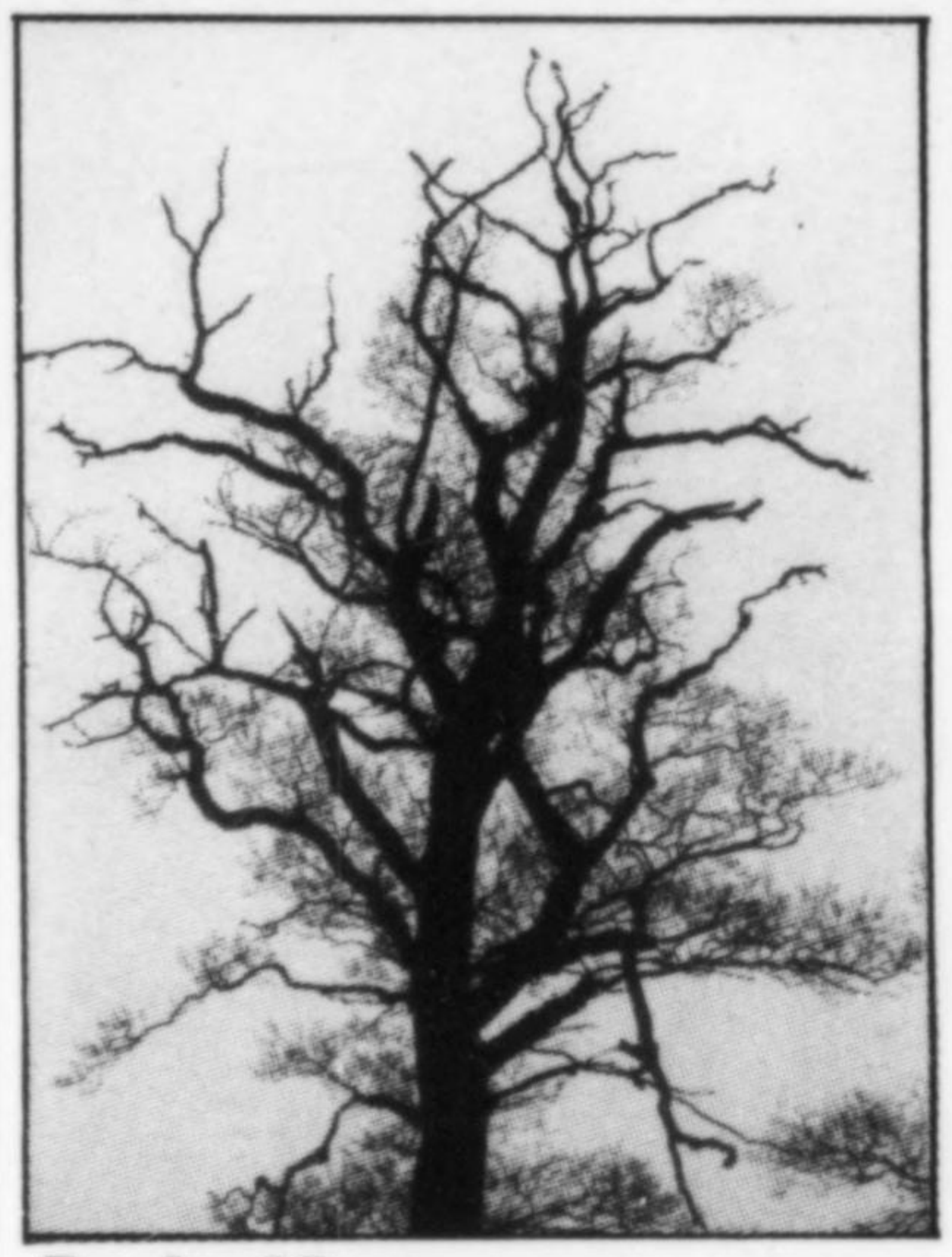

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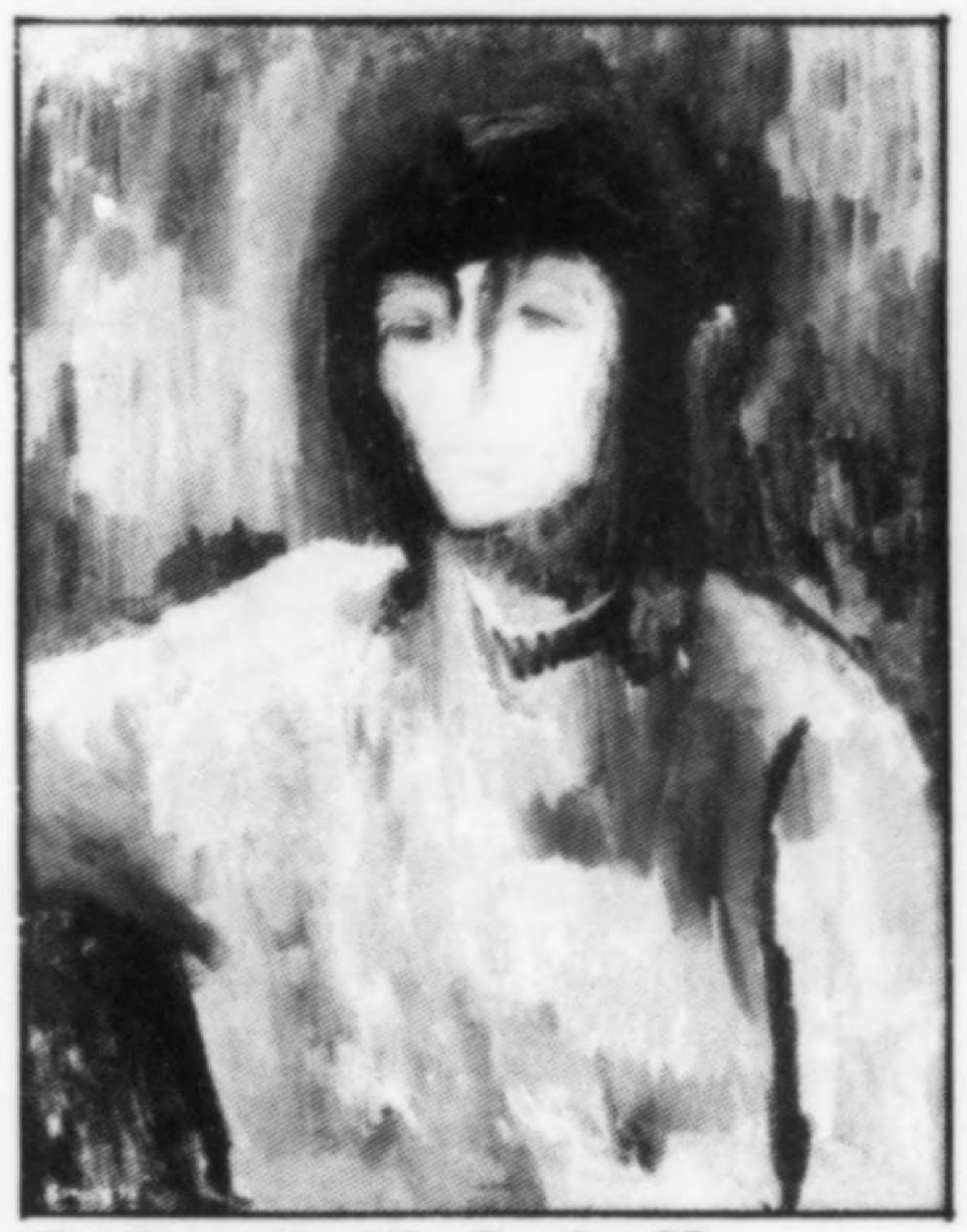

David Bomberg/Portrait of Dinora

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but the way the system works means they have to tread carefully. For Jobclub is Big Brother. Members attend at least twice a week, and if they fail to appear, the leader has to chase them up. Under the 1988 Social Security Act claimants not deemed to be "actively seeking work" may have their benefit stopped; Jobclub members who persistently fail to turn up may find themselves put into that category. Moreover, the leader has to watch everything they do and be shown everything they intend to do. This leads to friction and explains the slightly aggressive atmosphere in some clubs. While I was at Greenwich, there was a long argument between the leader and a member who wanted to be left alone and not be bothered with persistent questions. The leader has since left Jobclub work.

Members generally have a love-hate relationship with the leaders. They are, after all, the people who seem to want to help. When the Greenwich leader had her birthday, members got together and pooled what little money they had to buy her a bouquet, a cake and a card. Although Donal Coffey finds his job satisfying, he admits the job "is quite stressful, but up till now I've divorced myself from the catalogue of problems". John East, leader at the Burnt Oak Jobclub which specialises in helping ex-offenders, says "leaders often burn up within a year or 18 months because of stress."

Hackney Jobclub is as utilitarian and stained as Greenwich. Donal spends much of his time on duty reading out job vacancies to members and then writing out their applications and CVs using the applicants' own words. He can't teach them to read and write himself because he doesn't have the time, since each person is dealt with on a person-to-person basis. Sometimes he is able to refer members to Employment Training courses which teach these skills. In Hackney, around 25 per cent of the unemployed are illiterate. But Donal is optimistic: "Because of the shortage of school-leavers, larger employers like Sainsbury and Tesco are moving to recruit older people. This makes my job easier."

But this kind of enthusiasm can dry up quickly with the problems that leaders confront every day. As John Walsh, manager of the Warrington Jobclub, says: "As we reach the hardcore unemployed, we are finding that more and more have special needs. We are dealing with people who feel that the country has let them down." Both he and John East think that much more needs to be done: East wants at least ten more Jobclubs which could cater for ex-offenders. Walsh would like to see the clubs provide training themselves: "For example if an illiterate man loses his job, found through Joblub, he has the same problems all over again." And he won't get sent back there until he requalifies as long-term unemployed.

In the meantime, the members keep coming, searching for the job that will get them out of their dead end existence. Everybody celebrates in the Greenwich Jobclub when a member gets a job. The leader writes your name on a "roll of honour". You are immediately different from everyone else. As one person puts it: "You have the employed look."

FRINGE BENEFITS

Unofficial people

Colin Ward

A few days ago the novelist Mario Vargas Llosa won the first round of the Peruvian presidential elections. Latin Americans I know brush him aside as a right-wing adventurer in a country that has had to suffer plenty of left-wing adventurers, but I just want to introduce some striking statistics he mentioned recently:

"In Lima alone, the black market (excluding manufacture) employs 439,000 people. Of the 331 markets in the city, 274 have been built by the black-marketeers (83 per cent). It is no exaggeration to say that it is thanks to them the citizens of Lima are able to get around, because 95 per cent of public transportation belongs to them. The black-marketeers have invested more than a million dollars in vehicles and vehicle maintenance. As to housing, the figures are equally impressive. Half the population of Lima lives in housing built by black-marketeers. Between 1960 and 1984 the state constructed low-income housing at a cost of $173.6 million. During that same period, the black-marketeers managed to construct housing valued at the incredible figure of $8,319.8 million (47 times what the state spent). Economic freedom existed only on paper before the poor of our nation began to put it into practice independently."

This is Vargas Llosa's introduction to a new book: *The Other Path: the invisible revolution in the Third World* by Hernando de Soto (I B Tauris, £14.95). The choice of the world *black market*, which the author nowhere uses in describing the informal, unmeasured economy that actually keeps society going in any city in South America, Africa or Asia, is Llosa's. Most such nations have a ruling élite (the recipients of all those loans that the rich world's banks are agonising about—much of which the élites reinvest in the west, not in their own countries), an incredible bureaucracy busy ensuring that no one can actually do anything, and a sinister military caste togged out in Jermyn Street, and from other posh British supplies of gold braid and horsehair, lording it over peasant lads for whom the army is better than starvation.

Everyone, especially Vargas Llosa, knows that this is the truth, and to bring the issue a little closer to home, it is also true of the last 40 years of the Soviet Union and its satellites. There, jokers have observed an infinitely graded hierarchy of the black, grey purple and brown economies, as ordinary people struggle to get by in spite of the system.

What the third world poor assert is the right to exist, in the fringes or the margins of the approved way of getting by in life. Every ruling élite everywhere hates it and them. This is why in Britain's history the most savagely punished offenders were smugglers and poachers, each of them defying the ever-widening scope of the law.

For a century the growing power of the state has been squeezing out the poor and unofficial people: the gypsies and travellers were harried for not sending their children to school or for not registering their young men for conscription in 1916. Lloyd George's introduction of National Insurance meant that they could only be employed in casual work.

Before the second world war even skilled craftsmen were below the income tax threshold. The great triumph of the civil service in that war not only meant National Registration but the (said to be temporary) introduction of PAYE, which turned every employer into a tax collector, and of Purchase Tax (forerunner of VAT) which made every retailer a revenue gatherer too.

Unofficial people shrank farther back into illegality. It's important to stress that those who claimed nothing more than the right to exist weren't only backwoods folk in the depth of the country. They could be people escaping from a past, pregnant girls and no-good boys, poets and musicians starving in garrets, secular monks and nuns wanting holy poverty, nutters heroically surviving in their private worlds.

Ever since my upright friend Philip Sanson want sent to prison at the end of the war for "stealing by finding an identity card", I have pondered over the philosophical question of a government's power to determine any individual's right to exist.

The worst thing of all about the Poll Tax is not its manifest injustice. I am relying on *that* to ensure that the Thatcher period ends in ignominy. Far more terrible is the way it turns every temporary clerk in every district council's finance department into a detective, hunting down the last fly-by-night transitory person in the district. Merit will be won through each ingenious cross-checking of identities. What deformations will this bring to the 1991 consensus?

In colonial Nyasaland the Poll Tax was introduced to drive the "natives" into the money economy of the Europeans. *Our* government, elected with rhetoric about setting the people free, has consciously decided that those who have "gone native" may no longer exist.

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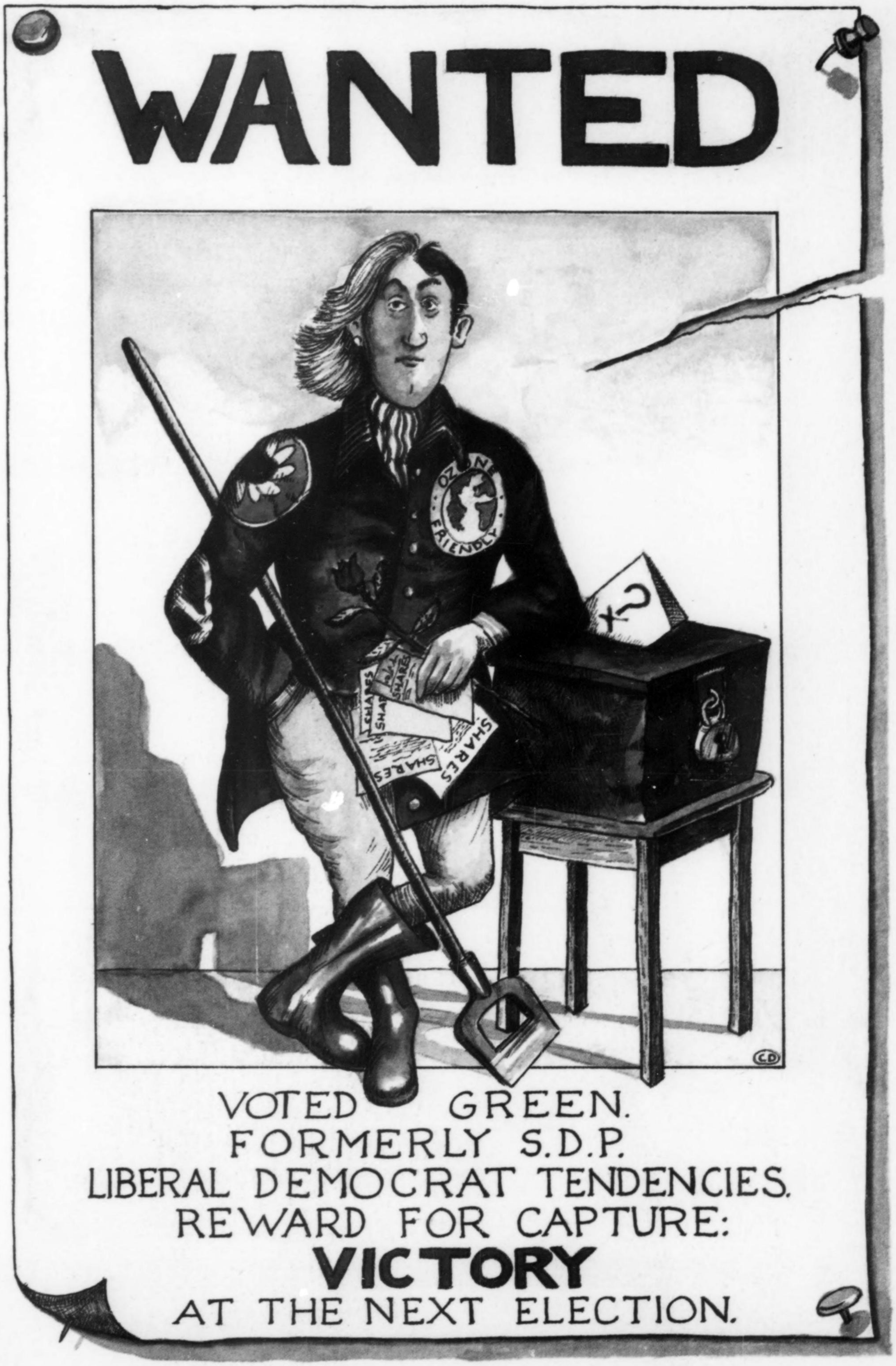
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Stuart Cosgrove: The Body Shop soft soaps Glasgow?

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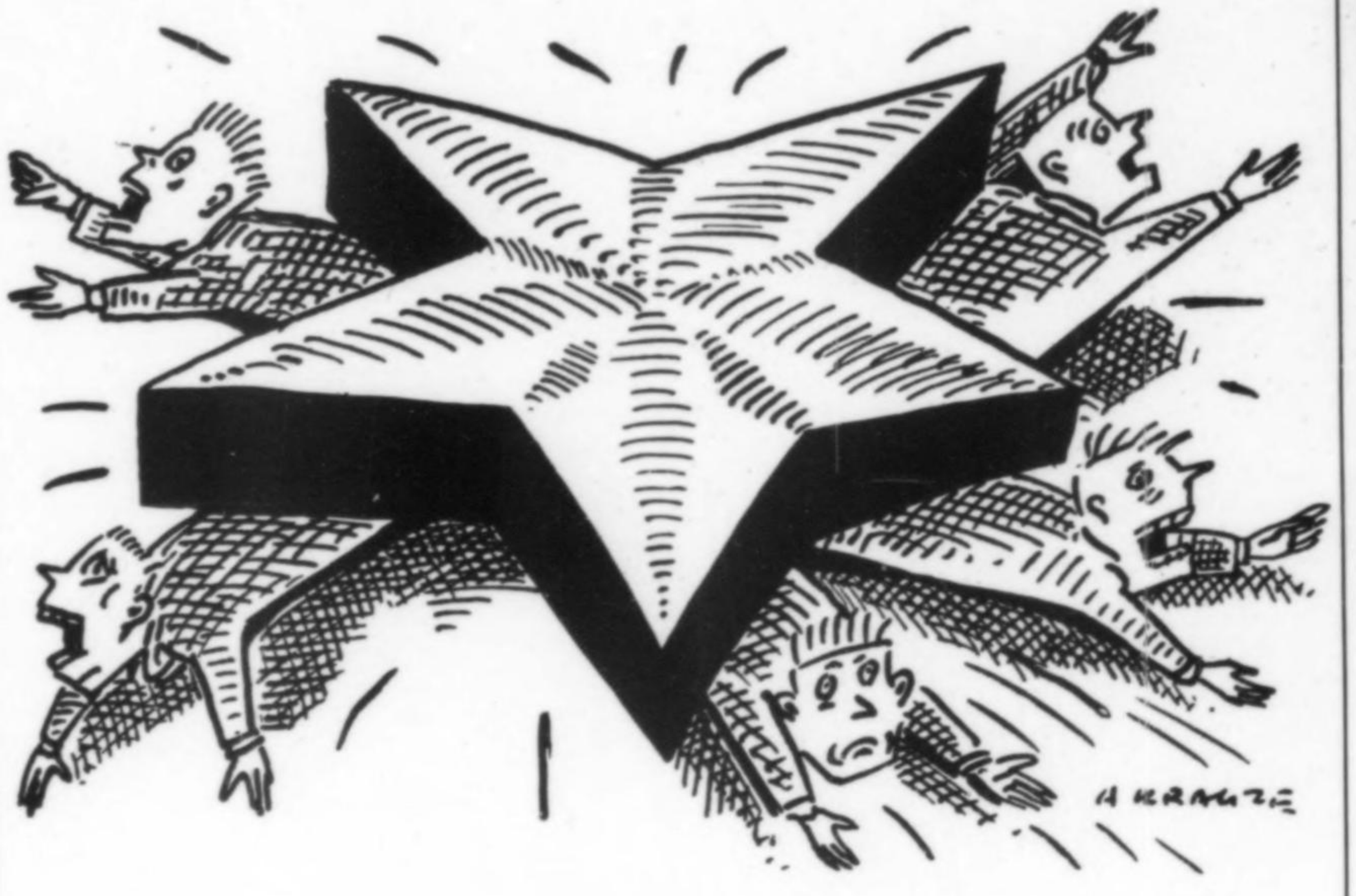

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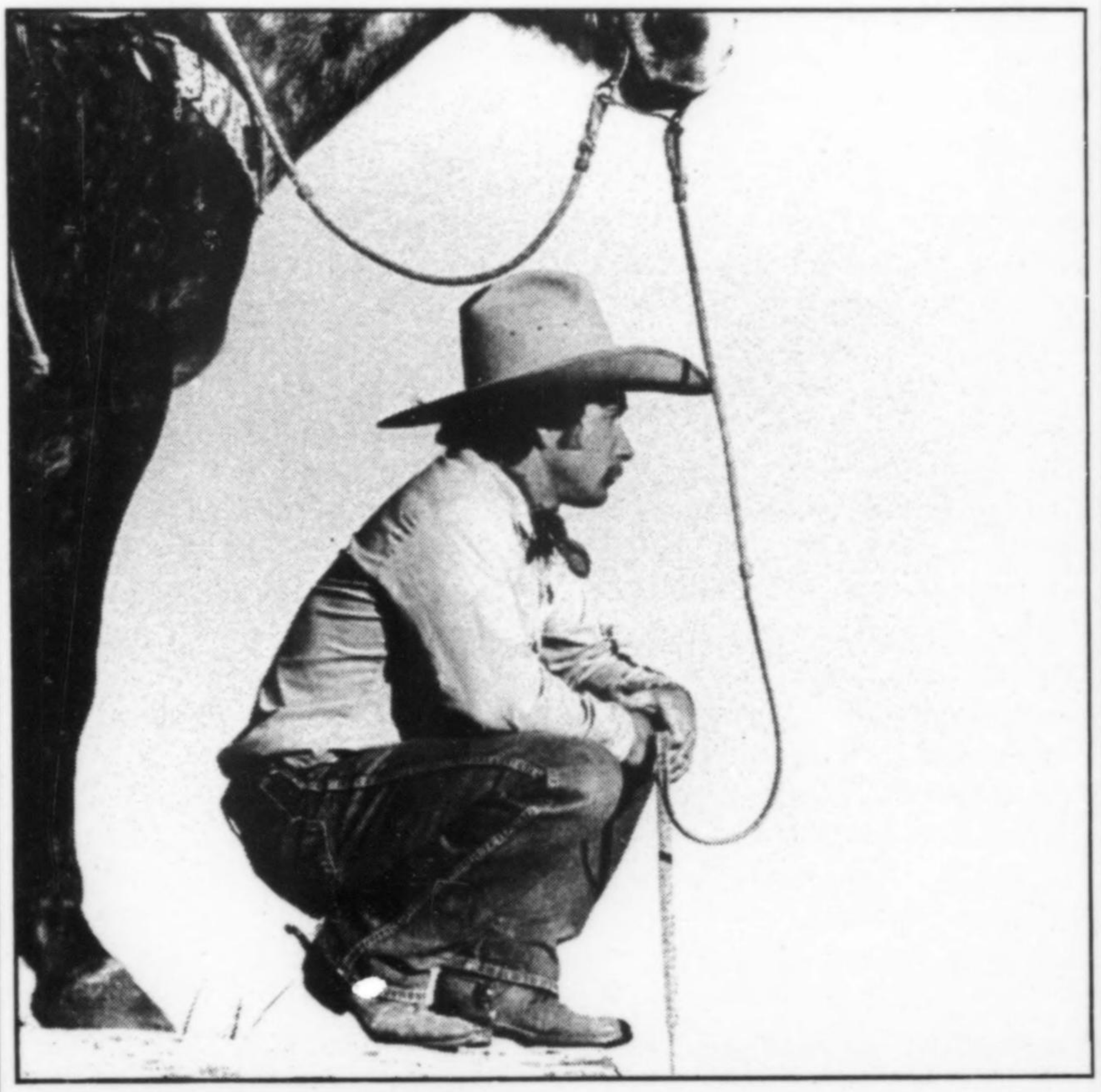

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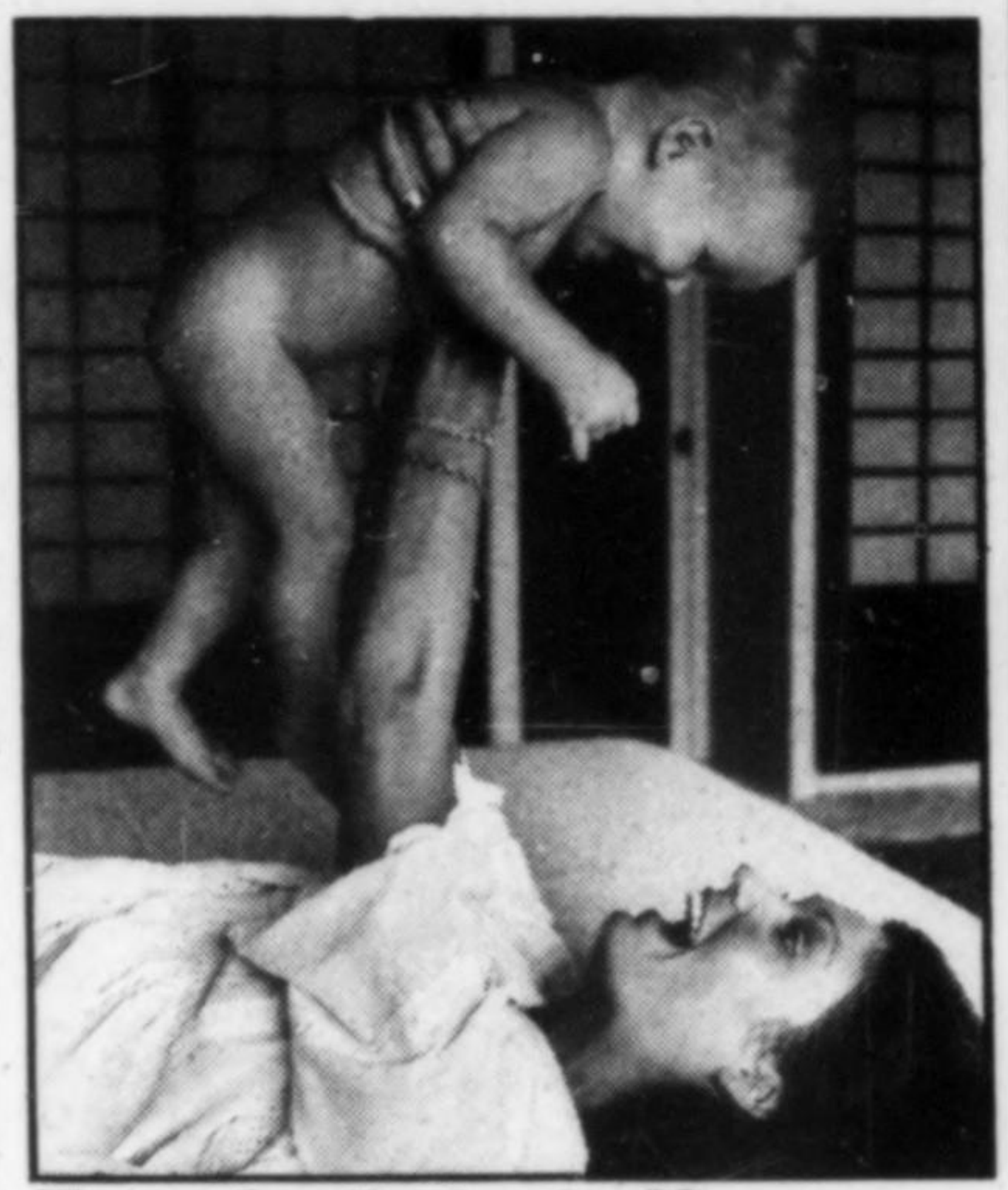

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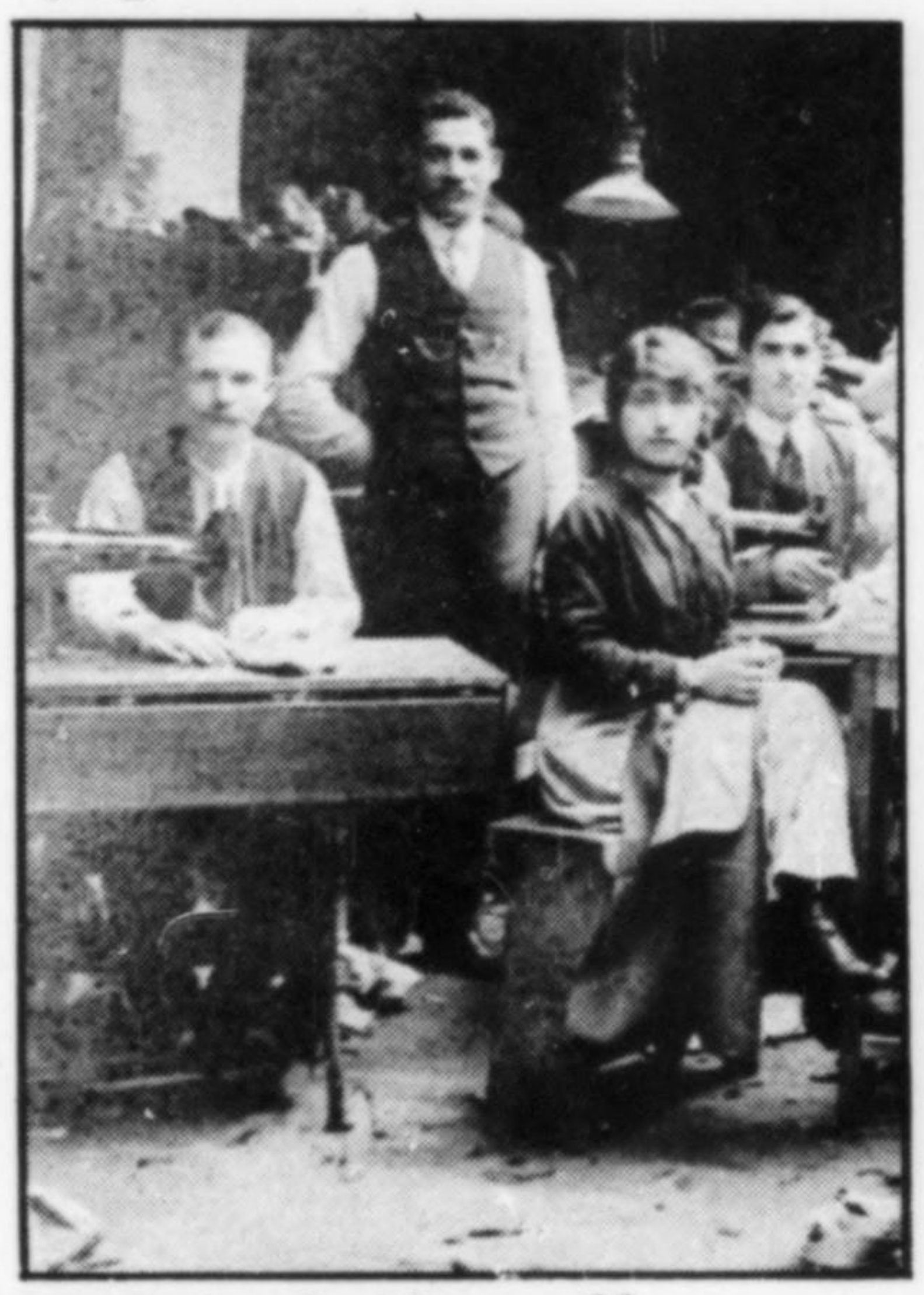

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government plans to provide substantial funds to increase the number of National Health Service clinics.

Reproductive medicine is becoming a thriving business that will benefit from the bill's enactment. Women unable to pay for treatment will not. Many will try to squeeze money for treatment from a limited budget. What is the cost to them when, as it will for many, treatment fails? Access to NHS clinics will be strictly controlled. Doctors will decide who is fit to be a mother, or rather, more fit than all the other desperate applicants for IVF.

Take one example. Will single women be given treatment? Here ambiguities in the bill emerge. Clauses 26 to 32 of the bill are designed to "tidy up" family law. Clause 27 ensures that sperm donors donating in a licensed clinic shall "not be treated as the father of the child"—appearing to sanction the creation of fatherless infants. Although attempts to deny access to any form of assisted conception to single women were defeated in the Lords, Ann Winterton plans to introduce an amendment in the Commons so that only married couples or those in a "stable relationship" are eligible.

A number of clinics offer donor insemination to single women. They may now risk being refused a licence if they continue to do so. Whatever the merits of aiding single women to have children, it is worrying that the bill seems to afford such women a right, while attempts are being made to deny such aid by the back door. It is an example of the power that the licensing authority will wield. Its code of practice will ultimately decide who gets, as well as who gives, treatment. And it seems that, rather than widening existing access to treatment, the effect of the bill may prove to be to restrict such access even for women who can afford to pay.

Is there a simple solution? Should more money be provided for NHS clinics? Should embryo research be permitted in order to improve the success rate of IVF? Access to treatment might be eased, but other doubts persist. Money for IVF will be money diverted from other areas of health care. Infertility, some claim, is a disease to be treated like any other disease. But what other diseases will go untreated? Would money be better spent in researching the causes of infertility rather than treating its symptoms?

In the popular media the plight of infertile women is presented in such a way as to suggest that childlessness diminishes an individual's womanhood. This is a pernicious doctrine demeaning to women, but a useful weapon in the campaign to persuade legislators of the value of assisted conception. What MP wants to be seen as "anti-motherhood"?

But the value of IVF to the community has so far gone unquestioned. The paradox of committing resources to increase the numbers of children on an overpopulated planet where existing children die of starvation and treatable disease has gone unnoticed.

It may be said the bill facilitates choice. Women have the right to choose or reject maternity by whatever means medicine makes available. Be that as it may, this bill does not offer many women that choice.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Follow the van

Colin Ward

It was only because the old Bedford with its faded red livery was part of the landscape, meandering round the lanes as regular as clockwork every Thursday, that we noticed the sudden absence of the Co-op Meat Van.

Of course it carried groceries too, but in any case we'd been bullied into a vegetarian diet years ago by our children, and for lapses or guests there are plenty of neighbours keeping every kind of fowl, happy to replenish the freezer if they have a pig or sheep slaughtered. So it's a long time since we bought anything from the Co-op Meat Van. We have played our own part in its disappearance, so why on earth should we feel a sense of loss because it won't be coming round any more?

It is partly the manner of its going. John, the driver and travelling salesman fell ill, after 38 years on the rural routes, so the service has stopped for good. Customers had no chance to say goodbye, and a notice in our parish newsletter explains that "all his grateful customers may contribute towards a farewell present for him" by donating to a collection box in the post office (when open).

A second loss is our local manager who retires next month, a symbol of Co-op history, having worked for it for 49 years. This was long enough for him to have met in his youth veteran members carrying on the folklore of how hard it was to establish the consumer co-operative movement in East Anglia, as opposed to the north west where it originally grew and flourished. In the pioneering days they went out through the byways of the district with horse-drawn vans, soliciting, picking up and delivering orders.

There was not only the butcher's van and the baker's van, but the dairy van too, as well as those of the rival private traders. Now only the milk float remains, every other day. Your caring, sharing Co-op no longer feels able to care that much. "The meat van kept going as long as John could, but you can't justify a round for old ladies buying half a pound of sausages, a small loaf, a tin of beans and a bottle of Camp Coffee, can you?"

Two revolutions have transformed rural life for the relatively affluent and worsened it for the relatively poor. The second of these is the arrival of the freezer. This never registered with me when I was a town dweller until about 15 years ago when, after talking to a group of teachers near Morpeth, I was the unexpected guest of one of them as her village became snowed up in the course of the evening. I asked how people managed in winter in those isolated settlements. "Oh, we could last out for weeks," I was told. "After all, *everyone* has a freezer."

Since those days we've joined the freezer revolution with its know-how about which fruit and veg freeze well or badly and when or where to buy in bulk. But of course plenty of people *don't* belong to the freezer culture for half a dozen reasons: they couldn't contemplate the initial cost, even second-hand like ours; their "unmodernised" cottages have no place to put it; their electricity bills are already worried over for weeks before the meter-reader comes and they would dread the endless extra charge; they never have enough spare cash to buy anything in bulk, and in any case lack the transport to bring the goods home.

In a one- or two-person household, daily demands are too small for them to see the sense in it. On the other hand, if they have children to feed, all the other reasons are multiplied. The poor pay more, however they manage their shopping.

But of course the primary change in rural life has been the universalisation of car ownership. The snag is that this prime assumption of both government and retailing policy just isn't true. Rural public transport has dwindled, and when there *is* actually a bi-weekly bus to the nearest town, the superstores and hypermarkets have moved out to the fringe. Poor rural families often make painful sacrifices in other areas of their budgets to run a car just because they have no choice.

Malcolm Moseley, the authority in this field, stresses that even in a car-owning household the car used by one adult for work is not available to anyone else, that only 64 per cent of men and 21 per cent of women hold a driving licence and that, apart from the 26 per cent of the population who are too young, this percentage is far smaller among unskilled manual workers and among the old. "Collectively these people comprise the *majority* of the rural population. The view that the rural accessibility problem affects only a 'residual minority' is a myth."

The same market forces that ensure that the surviving buses are half empty and are thus proved to be uneconomic similarly determine that John and the Co-op Meat Van must become a memory.

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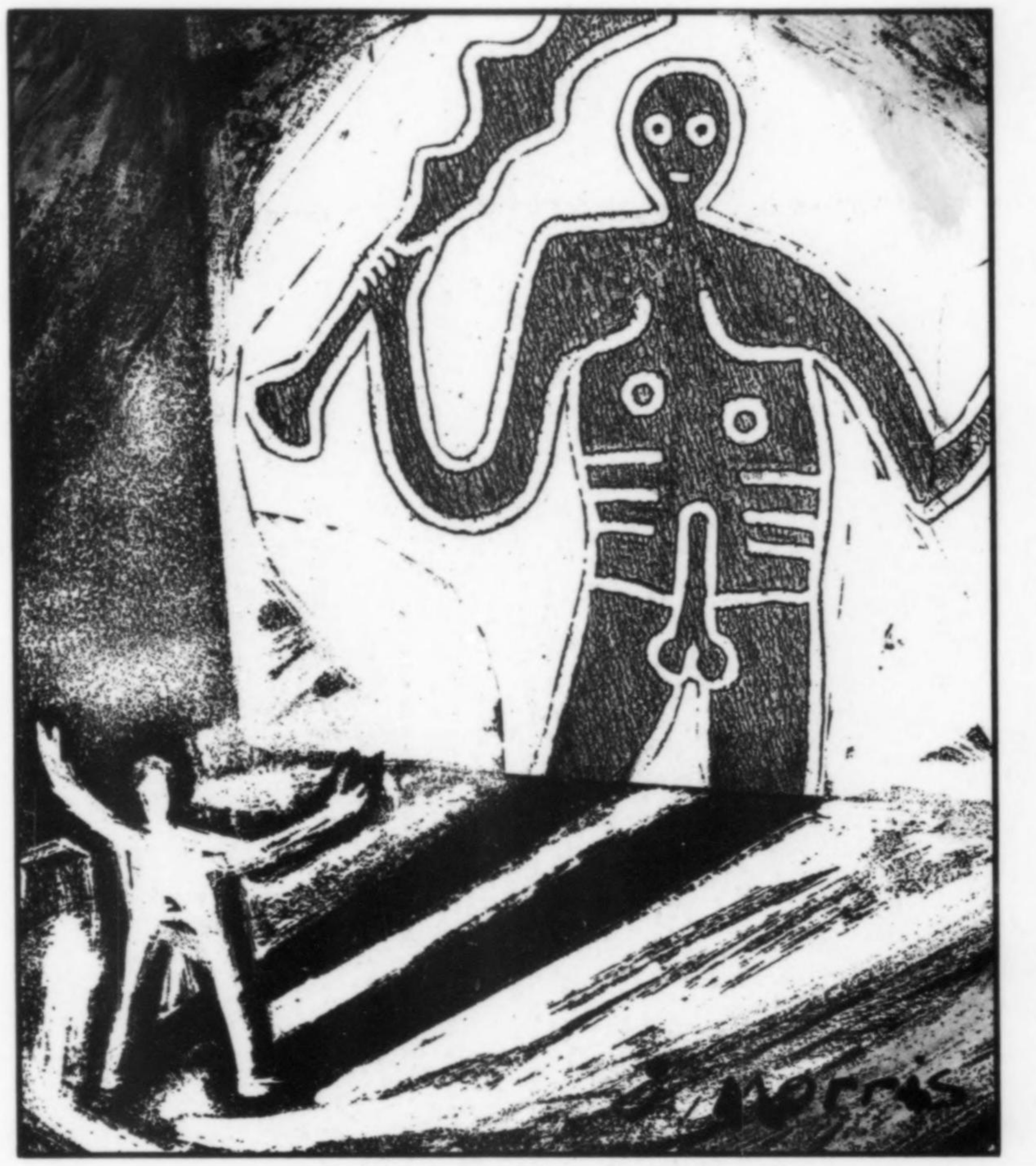
Power lust



"I was raped when I was 12 by a cousin. He was 18 and I had such admiration and respect for him until then. I fell into the trap of self-blame." A classic rape story—but the victim is a man. And he meets denial and mockery.

Anthony Barnett: An open letter to Neil Kinnock; R W Johnson on Neil's spring tide; David Caute on Islam's challenge to Labour

Michelene Wandor interviews Bertolt Brecht; Malu Halasa raps with the Black Watch; Suzanne Moore celebrates a gonzo docucomedy

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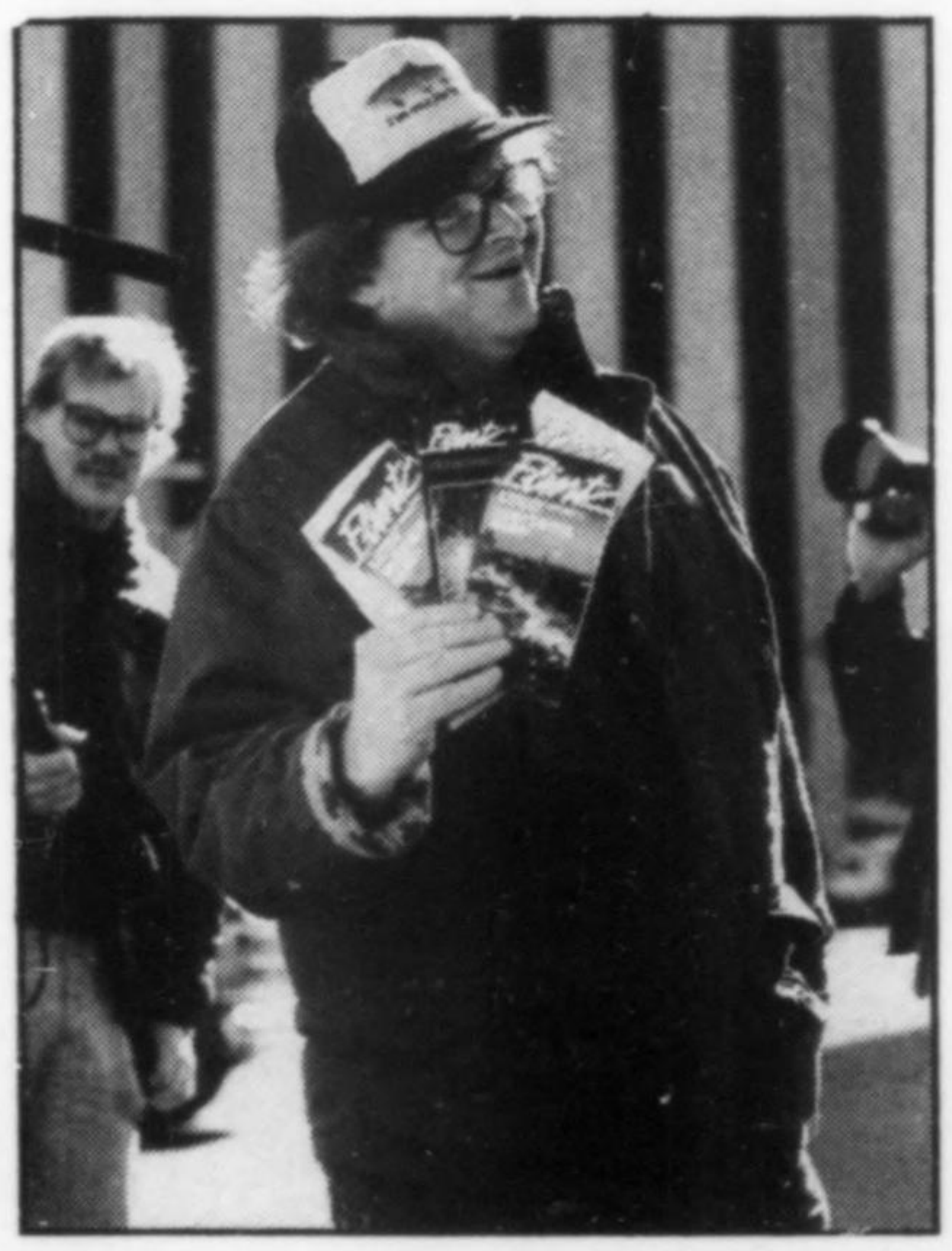

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is undoubtedly a small adult-education provider, but, it claims, a significant one. About half its effort go into trades union education. But it still maintains the liberal education tradition promoted by the likes of Albert Mansbridge and R H Tawney for which it is best known, and which has taken hundreds of working-class students into higher education through the adult residential colleges like Ruskin and Coleg Harlech.

The WEA has also over the last decade pioneered "second-chance" schemes for educationally disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities, the disabled, the rural working classes and women. "What is special about the WEA is that it gives its students influence and control over what is going on," says Ian Harford, of the north western district. "Anyone can come to us and ask for a course, draw up a syllabus and arrange classes at a time which is convenient to them. Our strength is our ability to respond to what people want, whether it's basic education, political studies, immigration law, relations with the police or women's studies." The WEA quards that strength jealously. In 1982, it turned down an offer of MSC funding because staff felt it would compromise their independence.

It has ensured that it has all-party support as it fights for survival. Neil Kinnock is concerned that a unique organisation, in which, he says, "the teachers tend to learn as much as the taught", might shrink at a time when it should be expanding to provide new routes into education for people of all ages.

Sir Rhodes Boyson took along a Conservative delegation to plead the WEA's case to Education Secretary John Macgregor. His parents, he said, attended WEA classes in Lancashire. "If the local authorities start cutting, this is the first thing that will go because it is something they do not organise themselves," Sir Rhodes predicts. "It is a disaster for an organisation which fits perfectly with the Conservative philosophy of self-help."

It is this cross-party support which leads Robert Lochrie to conclude that the threat to the organisation is not a Tory conspiracy, but a cock-up, simply a result of the DES's inability to arrive at a coherent policy for adult education.

"We know that DES internal auditors recommended a completely different system of financing the WEA. We also know that there is a DES policy review in existence on the WEA. Officials have brought it into my office three times and it has never come out of the briefcase. I can only assume that this secrecy is because the review supports the WEA and criticises the DES for what is in effect a policy vacuum."

The death of WEA—if it comes, and it certainly might within four years—looks like being the consequence of yet another bit of back-of-an-envelope policy-making at the DES which conflicts with cost-cutting local government strategies at the Department of the Environment. It will certainly not be the result of any rational planning process for adult education or, as far as can be seen, any serious consideration of the links between adult education and the government's avowed policy of increasing access to education at all levels for those who have never had access before.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Digging in

Colin Ward

The aspect of the Thatcher period that the future will find hardest to forgive is the degradation of public life. Under the guise of cost-effectiveness and of making a leaner and fitter economy, it has sedulously encouraged irresponsible and parasitical land speculation. We used to condemn asset-stripping when it was a matter of property sharks buying firms not for their output but for the potential of their sites. But no one imagined then that the government would seduce public bodies into the same anti-social conspiracy

This is what has happened. When British Aerospace bought the Royal Ordnance factory sites, it wasn't for the weapons factories and gunpowder works, but for the land they sat on. The Oxford University study of Rover's Cowley car factory similarly suggests that the site could be worth "up to £400m: almost three times what British Aerospace paid for the entire Rover Group".

The complicity of the citizen is ensured in deals like the sale of the water supply, not because shareholders wish to rise to the task of bringing our water up to European standards (that's a bill for you to pay) but because the water boards own vast areas of land. It's the same with British Rail, squeezed into every kind of deal with property developers so that the balance sheet will make the enterprise worth selling and, as the market slumps, obliged to resort to fares trickery on the traveller which makes railwaymen blush with shame.

This corrosion eats into every public body. "Council finances hit by property market collapse," says the local headline, explaining that only £3m is expected from sales of Suffolk County Council land, compared with "more than £11m raked in by the council from sales in 1988-89". It's the same with health authorities. Last month the South West Thames Regional Health Authority froze the building of three hospital projects because land sales raised only £15m instead of the expected £55m. Indeed a survey by the National Association of Health Authorities found that one in five report building plans threatened by falling prices for land sales. The government has deliberately induced all publicly funded bodies to become profiteers.

At the bottom of the pile are the poor old allotment holders, pursuing their uneconomic hobby on prime building land. At Witney in Oxfordshire the town council proposed to increase the rent of the Witney Allotments Association by 5,000 per cent: from £25 to £1,315. The association refused to sign the new lease so the council took over management of the site and is now faced with a rent strike. Association chairman Ron Hathaway explains that only last year they were moved to a new site with the promise that the new facilities would be provided at no extra cost. "The council sold the old site to developers for £1.4m. It's due to us that they made such an enormous profit. They just see our allotments as a gold mine".

In Northampton, where there has been the usual cyclical decline in demand for allotments, the borough council commissioned from its parks department a report on the future of its sites. The report reveals, without accepting any responsibility, that the council has for years neglected urgently needed work on fencing and road surfacing. It chooses to blame the victims. One site "gives the appearance of a shanty town which you would expect to find in a ghetto in some under deprived area" [*sic*] inhabited by people the writer describes as "Roumanians". The report suggests that some sites should be sold or turned to more lucrative uses to pay for the improvement of the others.

The report, written in a kind of parody of market language, using the word *price* where it means *rent*, and *customer* where it means *gardener*. It says that: "In this time of economic revolution and high-tech finance, it has become essential that anything must fight for its place within a given market. Allotments are no exception to this principal." [*sic*]

But allotments *are* an exception. If the market rules, why doesn't the borough sell off its parks? Allotments are the last vestige of the ancient belief that every citizen has a right of access to land for food production. They result from endless struggles in the 19th century. They are a service guaranteed by law, and if they are underused at the moment they should be improved and publicised. Land once sold is never recovered.

Protestors are fobbed off with hints that the 1979 Local Government and Housing Act overrules the Allotments Acts which say the sale of any statutory allotment land *must* be treated as income for the Allotment Revenue Account, not as a windfall to help a hard-pressed council meet its ordinary needs. The issue will be tested in the courts. But there is still time for Northampton Council to think again.

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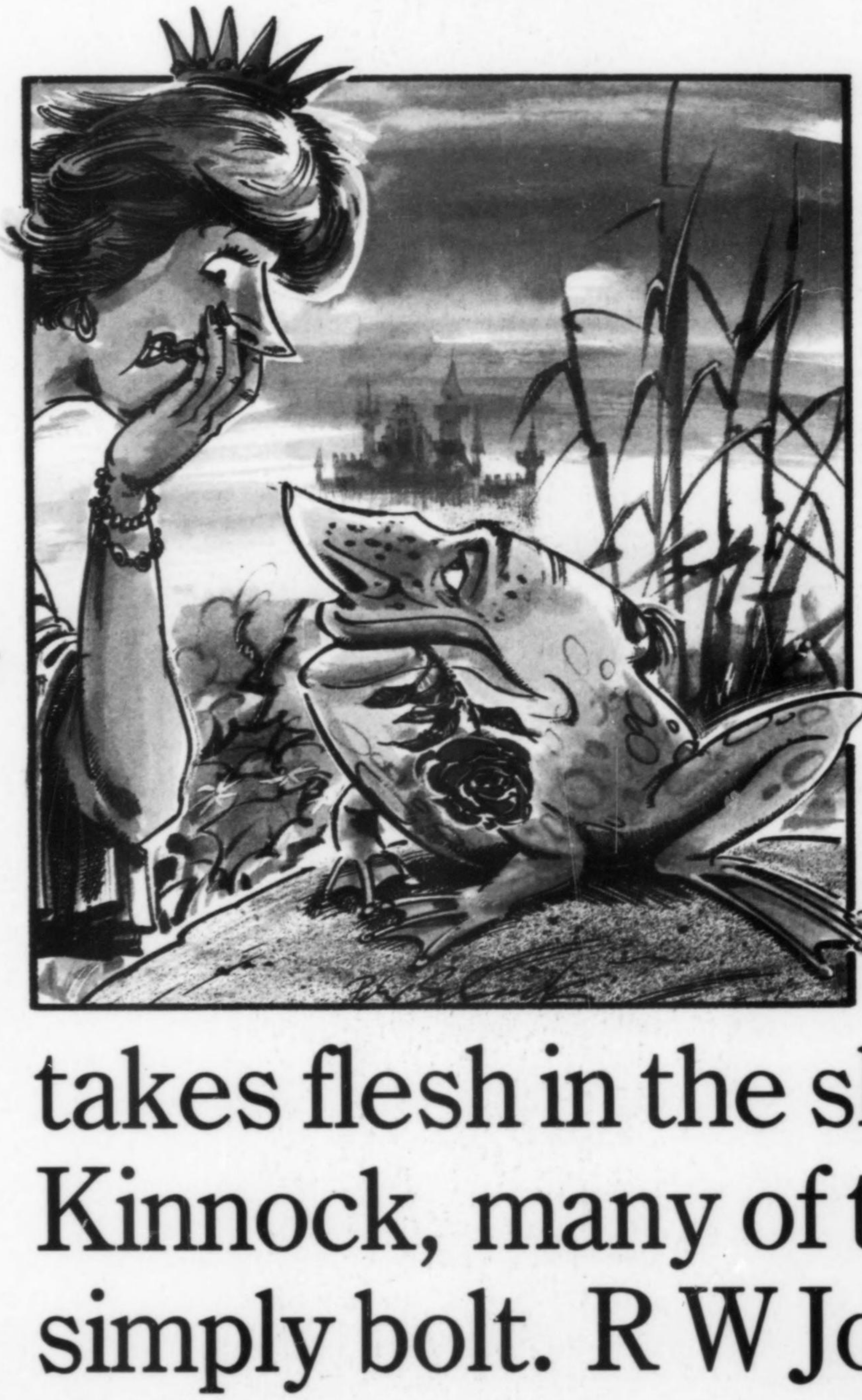
Woman trouble



Thatcher repels women—and so they choose Labour. But once Labour takes flesh in the shape of Neil Kinnock, many of them simply bolt. R W Johnson puts the electorate on the couch.

Meet AD—the Big White Rabbit who's out to save Britain's animals

Jolyon Jenkins trashes Lord Lane; Charles Leadbeater finds trade unions setting the agenda

Tariq Ali on David Selbourne; Stuart Weir on Tom Driberg

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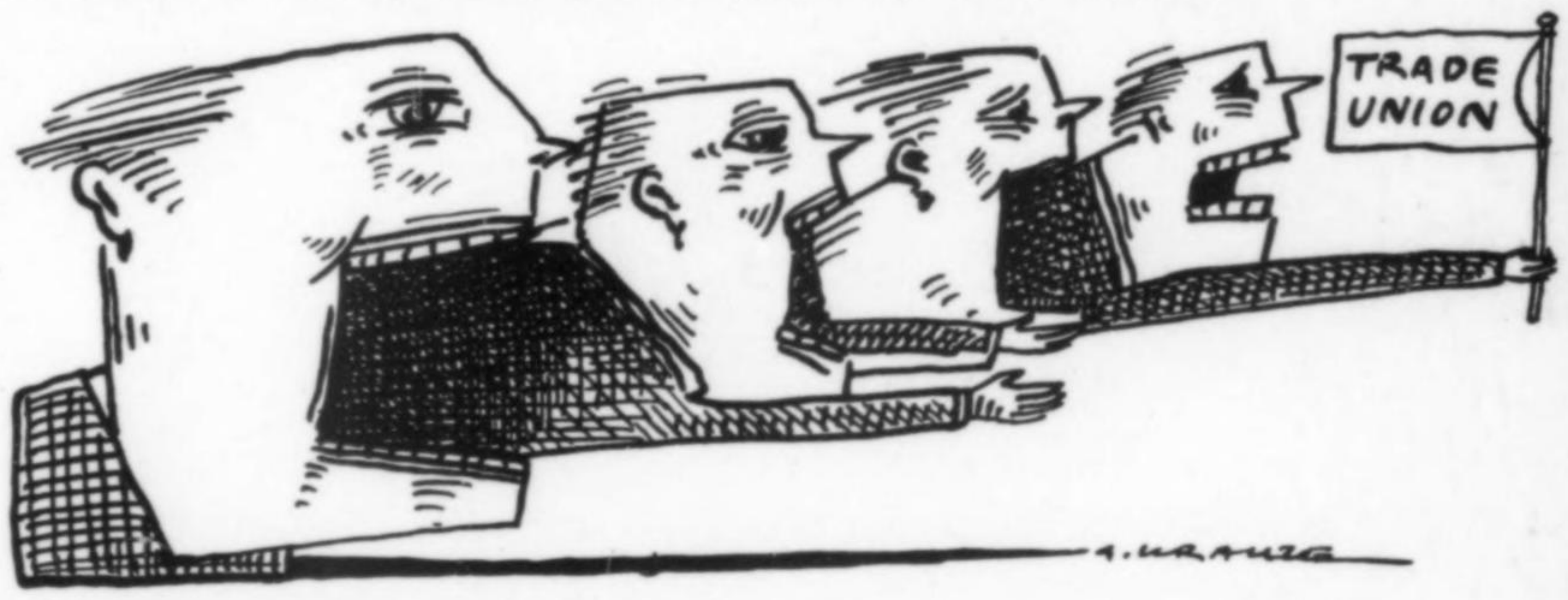

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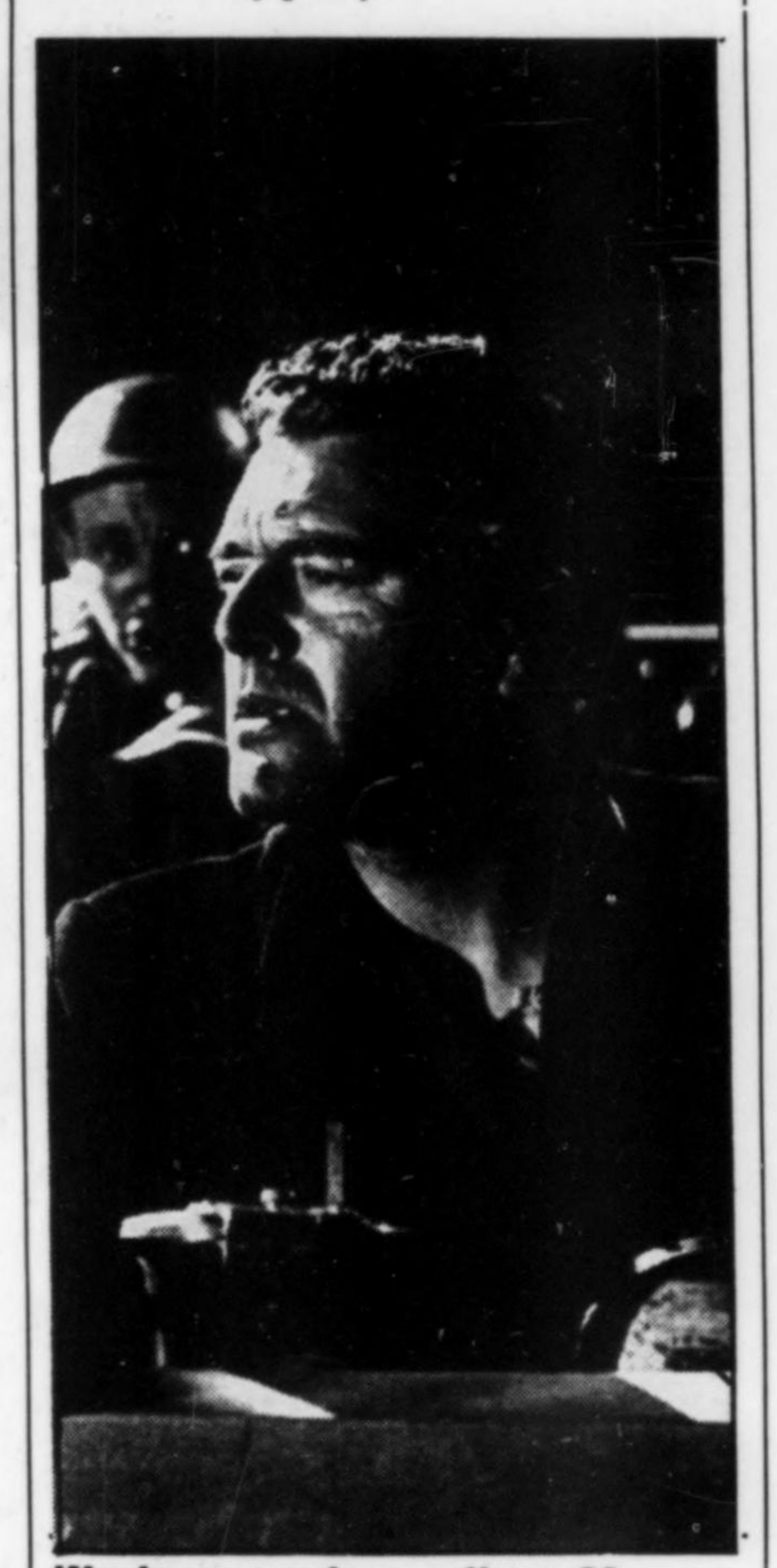

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FRINGE BENEFITS

Vandal-proofed

Colin Ward

Our impressions of place are built up of accidental, disconnected fragments. Mention Doncaster and racing people think of the St Leger, travellers of changing trains. I think of old 78 rpm records of Elizabethan madrigals, made long before the revival of interest in that kind of music, by the Danensian Singers under an inspired teacher William Appleby.

Or I think of the sweater, made of some polyester mix, that I still wear in winter, made by a miner's wife on her knitting machine and bought on a market stall. Or I remember my first impressions of the Arndale Centre. I was supposed to hate it, but what I noticed was the easy way that Saturday-morning shoppers simply deposited their children in the carpeted, open-fronted TV shop to sit, crosslegged, watching *Sesame Street*, until it was time to collect them. They were like the spellbound audience of the story-teller in a North African bazaar.

In other words, I have a totally irresponsible consumerist image of Doncaster. The real facts are that its place in our history is as a *producer* town—not only as a market centre for the scattered pit villages, but in casting and forging machinery for the agricultural industry and in the specialist spinning of brass, copper and steel wire. You won't need telling that it is one of those towns grieviously hit by the fact that the industrial centre of gravity has moved elsewhere.

The usual technique of blaming the victims was employed to chide Doncaster for its preoccupation with making things, rather than with selling, advertising or insuring them. And of course by the time the opportunity to improve Doncaster arrived, there was no cash in the till to do it.

A study conducted by Glasgow University's department of geography found that, in a ranking of environmental indicators, Doncaster was 30th out of 34 of "Britain's intermediate cities" assessed in an attempt to measure "Quality of Life". Not surprisingly this finding "caused some not inconsiderable local consternation and dismay", according to yet another investigation, a public attitude survey for Doncaster Borough Council by the departments of economics, public policy and urban planning at Leeds Polytechnic. It found that "noise and pollution, waste and spoiled land, poor image and lack of greenery and open space were not the problems to local residents that one might, as a casual outside observer, have expected."

But the public attitude survey did reveal Doncaster people's real worries. They were asked to name the most serious problems that the borough council should tackle. Nearly 40 per cent mentioned youth unemployment, over 60 per cent mentioned all unemployment. But towering among the perceived problems was vandalism, named by over 70 per cent of Doncaster households.

There's an irony here. In current circumstances what can any district council do about unemployment, except employ more people itself, and consequently get "capped" by central government's gauleiters? And what on earth can it do about vandalism? It's "an emotive and not easily defined area" is the rather uneasy comment of the people who conducted the survey.

Years ago I had a spell as a vandal pundit simply because I edited a book on the subject. Stan Cohen and I used to share out the endless requests to address meeting of councillors, community associations and chief constables. Comparing notes we found that they followed a pattern. The chairman would begin by stressing the dreadful social cost of environmental destruction, but later, over coffee, would tell us about the terrible things he used to do as a young tearaway, making no connections between then and now.

We got weary of requests to comment on endless research proposals on vandalism and made a pact one day with others in the business, that in no circumstances would we bless any project which was not built around action. We thought that, whatever else they did about the level of vandalism, plans to involve the young of different ages (with strictly *no* mention of anti-vandal aims) in adventure play projects, city farms, car workshops and stock car racing or community service schemes would at least benefit *someone*.

It's a social fact that for every ten citizens you can enrol in a shortlived local watch scheme, there is just one with the inventive imagination to engage others in a creative venture. The tragedy is that these precious people are not the ones who know the ropes when it comes to cadging money from funding bodies: their talents are different and much rarer. I've met people whose lives have been transformed by chance involvement in such projects, whether at the initiating or doing ends. But I never met anyone, except the researchers, who got anything out of an anti-vandal project.

Love me, pay my poll tax

If Mrs Thatcher is thinking of making changes to the poll tax, Brian Hill has some suggestions

Watch out. The snoopers are about. Listen to any Cabinet minister desperately trying to justify the poll tax and they invariably come up with something along the lines of, "Ah well, the great thing about the community charge is that it's an *individual* charge." Supposedly it is fairer as people become more involved in the democratic process for which they are now individually responsible.

But this doesn't extend to individual responsibility for non-payment. If a person has a partner (married or not) who refuses to pay, then they become responsible. It's called joint and several liability, and, in a way, it's an admission of defeat: the government knows that lots of people won't or can't pay and this is just another measure to try and make sure that someone else coughs up. Trying to sell us the idea of individual responsibility is just another piece of poll tax humbuggery. The money has got to come in and the government isn't that particular about who pays.

What about those men and women who live in the same household but regard themselves as separate in all other respects? Tricky one this, but the government has got round it with a foolproof method for assessing whether people are cohabiting. Local authorities (and in some cases magistrates) will be able to use the six DSS "criteria" that claimants of means-tested benefits have had to put up with for years.

It works like this. Two people deny they are cohabiting but the local authority is unconvinced. Of course it can't just believe what people say (remember, these rules were devised for *claimants*, so it examines the six cohabitation criteria and decides on a balance of probabilities whether or not the couple are doing exactly that. The criteria are to do with whether the couple live in the same household, what the financial arrangements are, the long-term stability of the relationship, whether there are children, how the couple appear in public and finally, whether there is a sexual relationship.

There are no hard and fast rules but examining each of the criteria can provide evidence in favour of or against cohabitation. Based on notions of marriage, people are assessed as to whether they are living together as "husband and wife". So looking at the criteria, if two people have a stable relationship and share household expenses, there is strong evidence of cohabitation. A sexual relationship is regarded as a clincher. According to a DSS handbook: "A sexual relationship is a normal part of marriage and therefore of living together as husband and wife."

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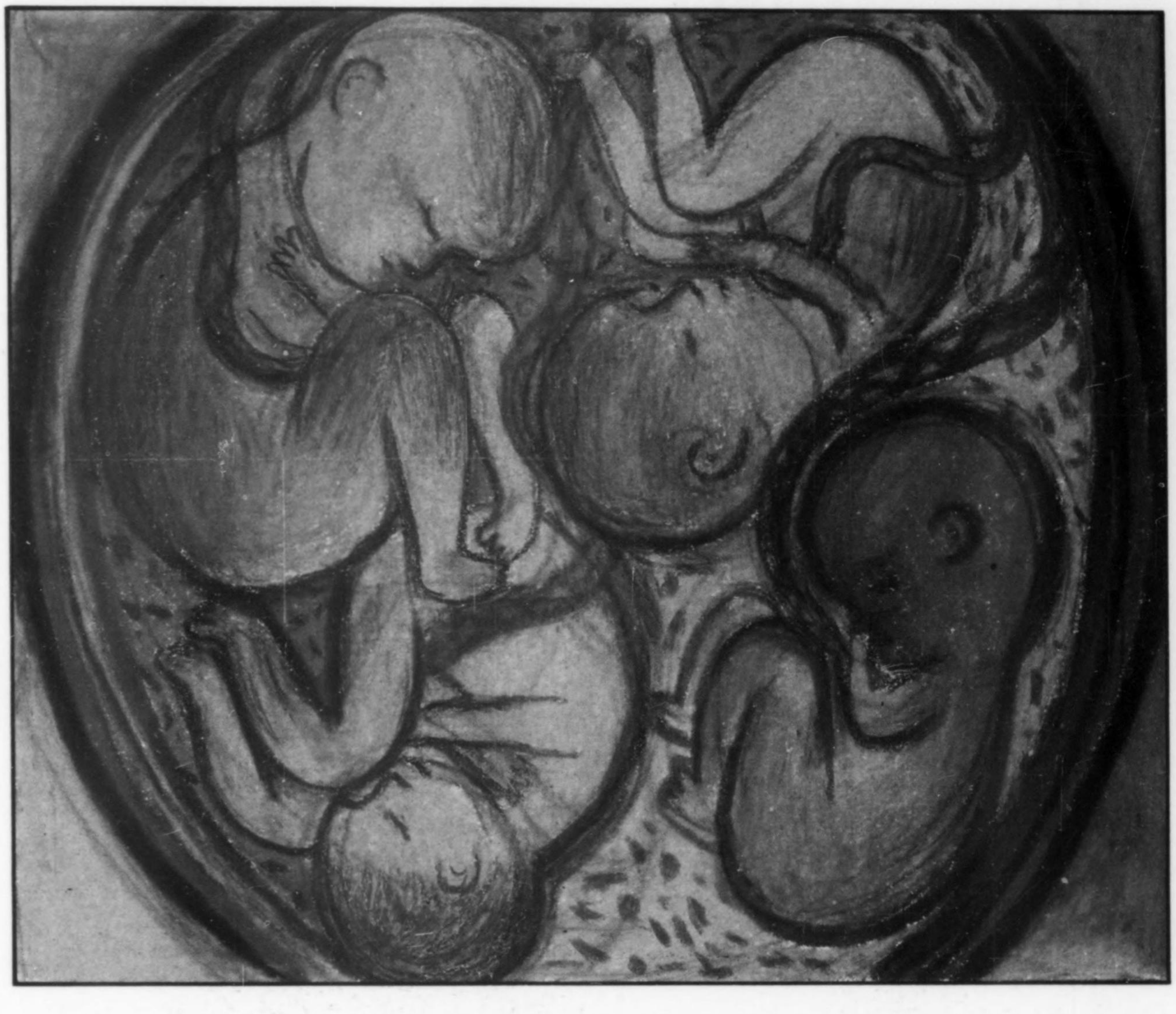

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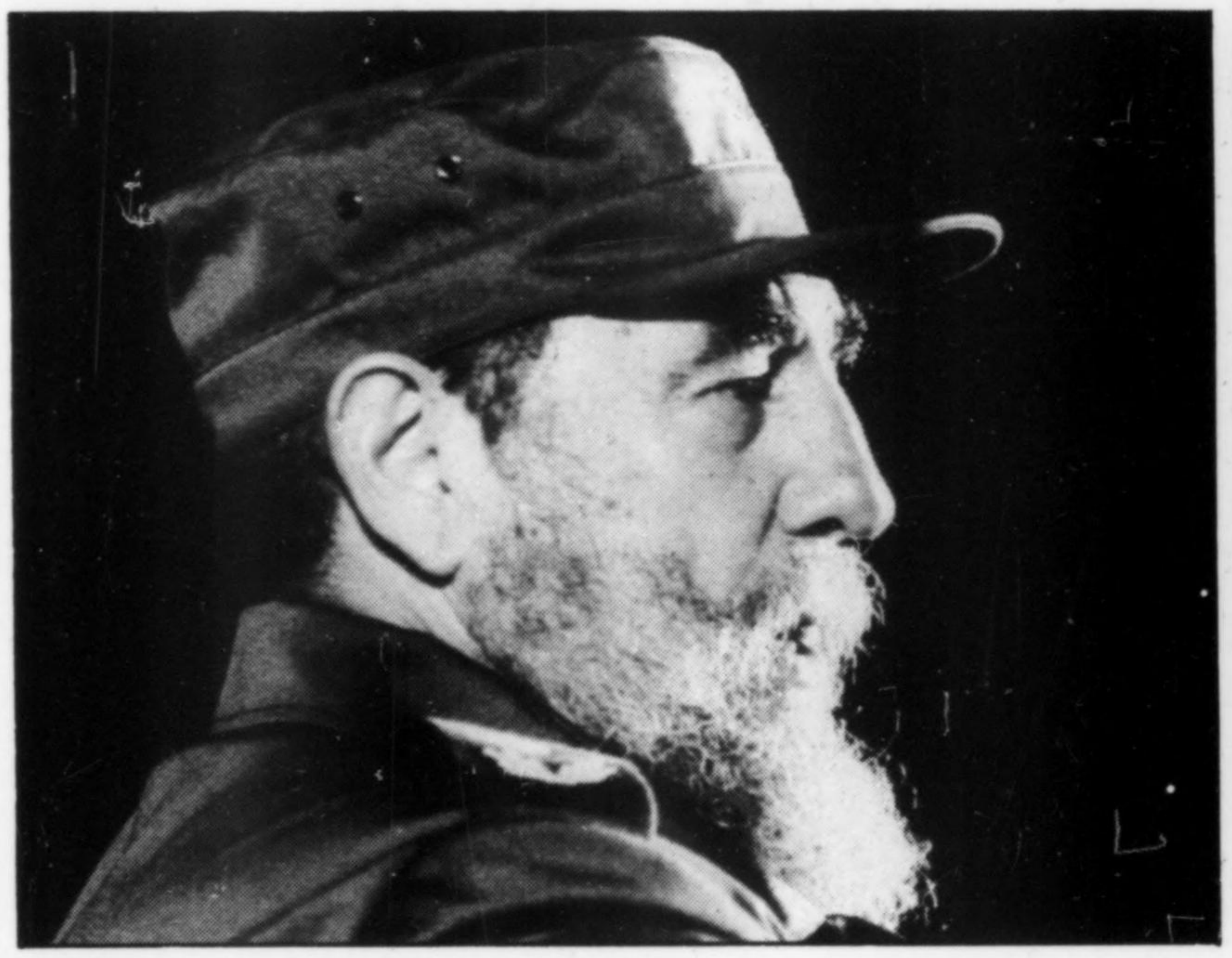

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the last year than in the previous decade. Management have unilaterally imposed new employment contracts going over the heads of the unions. One union rep says "our terms and conditions have been put back 20 years; management are very aggressive, they're trying to break us." Most workers have taken up the minimum number of shares allocated to each, but the total employee shareholding is small, and declining. Stewards describe the notion of worker participation through the ESOP as "crap".

There are probably no more than three ESOPs which have succeeded in changing the labour relations culture in Britain. Workers in the National Freight Corporation formally own 82.5 per cent of the company, which since the 1982 buyout has increased profits sevenfold; worker shareholders have seen the value of their shares grown eightfold, and over 400 of them are now quarter-millionaires. Although conventional labour relations structures remain, managers think the scheme has altered employee attitudes: one director says the scheme has been "very important. I can't quantify it. I'm just damn sure that it's worth something."

The Roadchef ESOP also seems to have changed attitudes. One worker explained it as follows: "You certainly try to work harder for the company and the managers. Everywhere we waste money is money off our shares." In People's Provincial Buses in Hampshire, trade union membership has fallen from 95 to 55 per cent of the workforce, and a new staff association has been set up with the intention of superseding the union. According to a management spokesman: "They are their own men now."

But trade unions can relax in the knowledge that these few examples of the Thatcher dream in action are unlikely to be duplicated in large numbers. Although the government and City could decide to relax substantially constraints on ESOPs in order to give them a boost, in so doing they might simply replicate US experience and end up giving large corporations yet another means of obtaining dubious financing (American regulators now regard ESOPs in the same light as junk bonds). As employee share ownership in general has had far less influence on industrial relations than anti-union legislation, it would be surprising if the government followed this path.

Wider share ownership is now largely dependent on the remaining privatisations—electricity, British Rail and British Coal—but only electricity is likely to be sold off before the next general election. And with continuing high interest rates and a mixture of saturation and stagnation in the housing market, there are fears that future equity sales may be undersubscribed by the public. There's simply less money around.

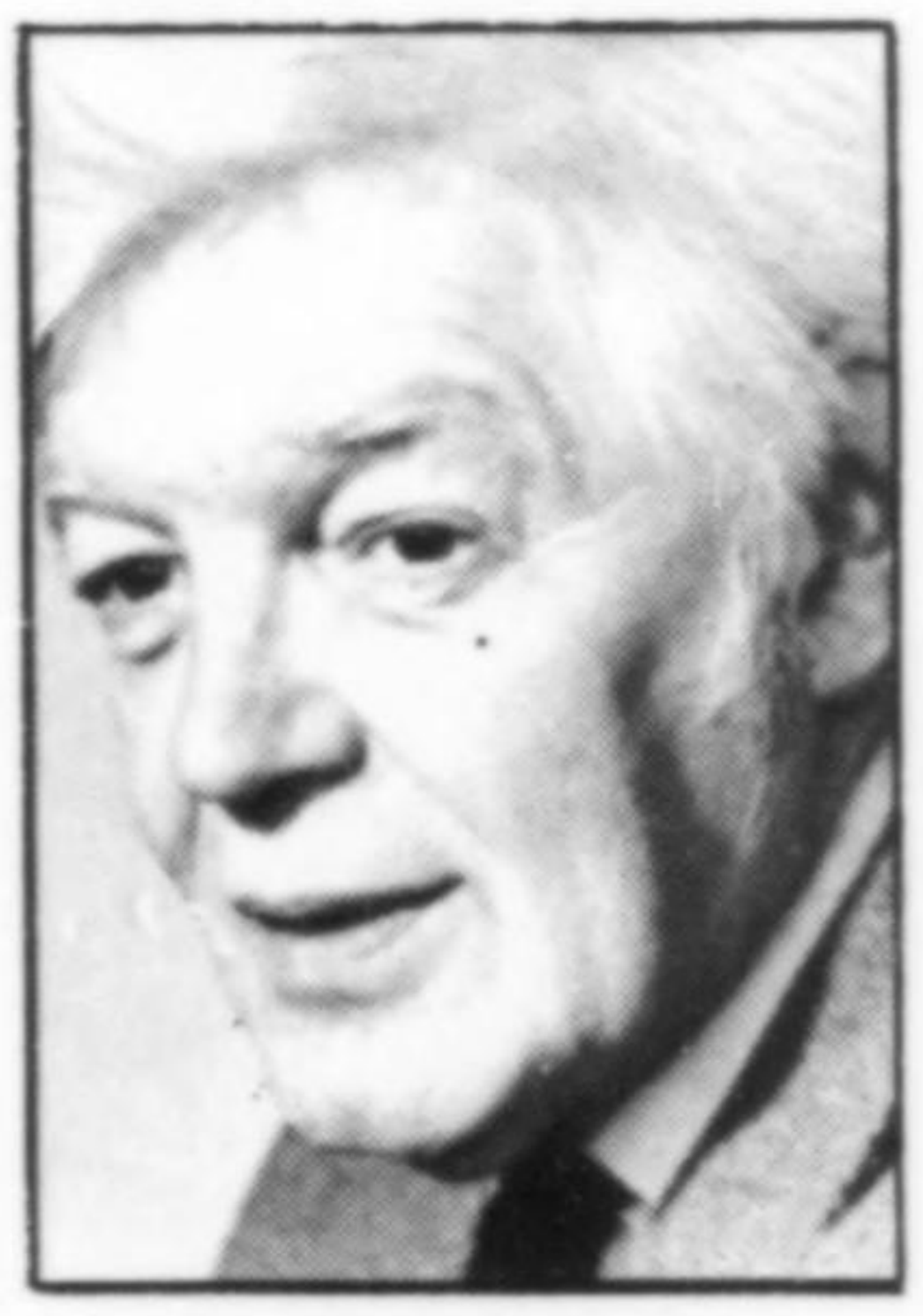
One way or another the "great shares experiment" is running into the ground with not a lot to show for all the hype.

"Shares for employees; A test of their effects", D G Blanchflower & A J Oswald, Centre for Labour Economics Discussion Paper No 273, London School of Economics, 1987.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Los remendados

Colin Ward



In Bizet's *Carmen* there's a small part for a local brigand called El Remendado, which I suppose means something like "the patched-up guy". It's usually played by someone from the chorus, pleased to pick up a solo role, but sometimes by an ageing tenor who doesn't bother about keeping up appearances, and brings to his little scene the air of authority that is natural to him. The rest of the performers have an automatic deference. And he loves it, backstage.

I was irresistibly reminded of this role through watching Sir John Harvey-Jones in the local episode of his BBC2 Tuesday series *Troubleshooter*. He's the former chairman of ICI, and he plays the part of captain-of-industry and robber-baron to perfection, and he brings this air of power as he's driven up the lanes to tell the boards, though not the employees, of smallish businesses, where they have gone wrong.

There's a firm round here called Copella Fruit Juices Ltd, who began as apple-growers and then, because the apple wholesalers demanded that all those Cox's Orange Pippins should be of a uniform size, got into the trade of marketing apple juice. The outfit grew and grew, processing every kind of fruit juice. As the owning family expanded, so did its interests so, apart from general farming, it extended into "Peake's Organic" and the Stoke-by-Nayland Golf Club. As far as the juice was concerned, they displayed a certain pride in the superiority of their product, sold under their own name and under that of some of the multiples.

Sir John examined the balance sheets and with the utmost good humour told the assembled and reverential family that they should get out of this tedious fruit juice business and concentrate on the more lucrative side-shoots of the enterprise. I'd seen enough, but I felt a strong sympathy with Vera Rule's comment in *The Guardian* that "no fictional industrial narrative has come near the simultaneously sad and massively comic quality of this series", with Sir John being so often "cruelly-kind, telling management they have no clue, factories no product and workers no future".

The real tragedy is that governments (not just the Copella directors) always depend on *los remendados* from ICI to patch up the economy. From Lloyd George in the first world war to Winston Churchill in the second, they've been fascinated by the brigand chiefs. Bernard Shaw's Sir Andrew Undershaft in *Major Barbara* was modelled on the founder of the firm, and we can recognise his dynasty in Timothy West's portrayal of Bradley Hardacre of Imperial Munitions in *Brass*.

"You will find out," says Shaw's Undershaft of 80 years ago, "that trade requires certain measures when we have decided on those measures. When I want anything to keep my dividends up, you will discover that my want is a national need. When other people want something to keep my dividends down, you will call out the police and military. And in return you shall have the support and applause of my newspapers, and the delight of imagining that you are a great statesman."

Instead of being affronted, politicians lap up this kind of talk, firmly convinced that what is good for ICI is good for the country. This is why they lured Dr Richard Beeching away from ICI to become, at what was then regarded as a scandalous salary, first chairman of the British Transport Commission and then of the British Railways Board. His task, like that of his successors, was to make the railways pay, and his response had the same breathtaking directness as that of *El Remendado* to Copella: locate the least profitable lines and then eliminate them.

The fact that the Railway Board's business is running a railway is as irrelevant as the fact that Copella's business is producing high-quality apple juice. Government's belief in *los remendados* brought in from mogul-land has ensured a succession of charismatic chairmen at BR. The most recent, ironically, was a lifelong railwayman, Sir Robert Reid, who retired last month. He is regarded as being the most successful so far, in terms of improved efficiency and finance, within the straitjacket of the government's insistence that BR is, like Copella, an enterprise run for profit.

It was reported that up to 20 captains of industry turned the job down before it was finally accepted, at a phenomenal salary, by another Bob Reid. Who he? Well, of course he's the chairman of Shell UK.

The *Troubleshooters* series ended with a studio confrontation between *El Remendado* and the managements he investigated. Copella had followed his advice and sold half their business to a cider firm. Apricot computers sold out to a Japanese multinational. Only the hospital managers from Shrewsbury were bold enough to say that the man from ICI hadn't the first idea of why they were in business.